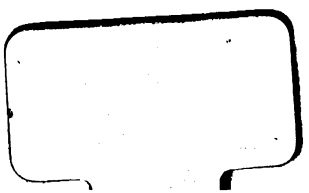

FROM THE WINGS.

FROM THE WINGS.

A Novel.

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AUTHOR OF "JENNIE OF 'THE PRINCE'S,'" "NELL, ON AND OFF THE STAGE," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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CHAPTER I.

HOMELESS.

A cry that went up single, echoless:
My God, I am forsaken!

WHAT had become of Clare?

It is time that this haunting question, which puzzled and perplexed poor Harold Steele, leaving him no rest or peace, should at length be fully answered for the reader's benefit.

Chill without and chill within was that ill-fated gusty October day on which Lord

Verstrume paid his last and memorable visit to Hyde Park Place.

From the time of his lordship's first introduction to Mrs. Steele's domestic circle, that lady conceived and entertained ambitious hopes for her dear Cecilia's ultimate promotion in the social scale, by dint of her marriage with the noble lord with whom "the child" had become acquainted on the occasion of her *début* at a subscription-ball at Willis's Rooms. The *raison d'être* for the ball was a charity. The tickets were sold at the uniform price of a guinea, and were to be obtained from lady patronesses only.

This was supposed to insure the elevated social status of the purchasers. Mrs. Steele volunteered to become responsible for the sale of twenty-four tickets, and was consequently requested to have her name printed among the list of patronesses.

Lord Verstrume applied to her for six tickets. He drove to Hyde Park Place in his elegantly-appointed brougham, and made the application in person.

Mrs. Steele received her distinguished visitor with flattering *empressement*, and hastily summoned her dear Cecilia, whom she "longed to present to his lordship."

His lordship was more than gracious; he bowed and paid fulsome compliments, with what Mrs. Steele deemed a true courtier's powers of fascination.

Poor lady! What could she know of courts or courtiers?

Being told that Miss Steele was about to make her *début* in the world of fashion, on the occasion of the ball for which he had just purchased tickets, Lord Verstrume immediately requested that radiant young lady to reserve two dances for him. She consented with very evident delight; and Mrs.

Steele from this moment began to indulge in glorious visions, in which her Cissy figured conspicuously as "my lady."

Lord Verstrume was old, and he was ugly—a leering satyr, as Maurice had said; but he was a lord, a bachelor, and rich.

What fault can be found with a man who possesses a title and thirty thousand a year? He had heard something relative to this household in Hyde Park Place which made him desire to ingratiate himself there. He was a cunning old man, and a cautious one, and felt his way to the end he had in view with considerable skill.

"The fame of your daughter's charms has been trumpeted abroad, my dear madam," he said, with what he intended as an appreciative smile; "but I thought I had heard of two young ladies. Will you not allow me, like Paris of old, to see the three Graces together?" He bowed to his

delighted hostess, who fully appreciated his gallantry, and thought him the most charming, the most polished of men—and lords.

"But Amy is only a baby," she cried deprecatingly; "she is still in the school-room, at work with her governess."

"I love babies," replied his lordship, smiling sweetly; "but suppose I must not interfere with lessons. Still I am most anxious to make the acquaintance of every member of your family, my dear Mrs. Steele; and as I presume there is a gathering of the clan at luncheon-time, I feel almost tempted to make so bold as to crave permission to remain, a privileged guest, at your hospitable board."

How charming he was! What affability, what condescension! Inviting himself to luncheon too, a request Mrs. Steele could really never have summoned sufficient courage to prefer to a stranger—to a lord!

He did remain to luncheon. He saw and kissed "sweet Amy." He said she was the baby rosebud blushing on the parent stem. And he glanced at the tall handsome girl who accompanied Amy, and to whom he was not presented. Taking his cue from his hostess, he apparently ignored the governess, silent beautiful Clare. But he heartily congratulated himself on the success of his errand. The game was well worth the candle. Before he took any active part in it, however, he must become a little better acquainted with the cards held by his probable opponents, Cecilia and her mother, and by his wholly unconscious partner, the modest unresponsive young governess.

Encouraged by the beaming smiles of Cecilia, and fortified by several glasses of Mr. Steele's excellent old port, his lordship suddenly resolved on leading a trump-card.

"I am going to ask you a favour, my

dear Mrs. Steele," he said. "Let me have the privilege of presenting a couple of ball-tickets to my sweet little Amy and Miss——? Then we shall be quite a happy family-party."

"Tickets for our ball to a child and her nursery-governess? Certainly not, my dear lord—most certainly not. Amy is far too young, of course, and—and, in fact, it is quite out of the question."

This with indignation.

"Do not let us look upon the *réunion* as a ball, my dear madam," pleaded his lordship. Resistance always goaded him on to persevere in any course he had adopted. "Let us rather regard it as a work of kindness and Christian charity only. No one can be too young or too—humble" (this was understood as intended for Clare) "to aid in so noble an enterprise."

But Mrs. Steele was obdurate; and Lord Verstrume felt he had forced his trumps too

soon. No matter how promising his hand, he must play his cards more warily in future, and reserve his strength.

Such a glorious "odd trick" as this charming young governess was well worth waiting for. He could afford to watch and bide his time. To facilitate matters, he commenced to pay the most assiduous court to happy Cecilia. Thus he secured a constant welcome for himself in Hyde Park Place, and he determined to ignore the occasional appearance of Clare as rudely as Mrs. Steele herself could desire.

This in the house.

But out of it, he soon contrived to arrange surreptitious meetings with the young "nursery-governess" and her charge. He discovered the hour and the direction of their matutinal walks, and either waylaid or followed them, with the very unsatisfactory

results so elaborately described by Mrs. Steele to Maurice in a previous chapter.

At last that terrible hour arrived when his lordship, carried away by his infatuation, maddened by baffled passion, became utterly reckless of consequences, and stealthily entered the little room on the landing, where he knew Clare was wont to pass her time, working for her exacting mistress.

He had vainly entreated for "just one kiss" during many weeks past. He had offered the young girl money. He had sought to bribe her with the promise of unlimited banknotes, of splendid jewellery, and very fine clothes. She had steadily and persistently repulsed him, and of late had even ceased to appear in Kensington Gardens, intent on those matutinal walks which gave Lord Verstrume his only conversational opportunities.

But his lordship was not apt to be foiled

in any enterprise on which he had set his heart (?).

What she would not give, he must contrive to take.

So he surprised her as she sat alone at her work. And when she started up, amazed and indignant at this intrusion, he clasped her in his arms and strove to kiss her lips.

Outraged and terrified, poor Clare rushed to the door and cried for help.

Mrs. Steele has already explained the result of the girl's appeal, and the bitter expressions of that lady's virtuous indignation need not be recapitulated here.

Suffice it to say that Clare, instead of help and sympathy, received only harshest condemnation. She was told that the hateful attentions of Lord Verstrume, which had of late amounted to systematic persecution, were the consequences of her own brazen effrontery;

and she heard, with mingled horror and dismay, that she herself was entirely to blame for what she was pleased to call the insult put upon her this day.

Mrs. Steele wound up her tirade of abuse by telling Clare that she could no longer be considered a fit associate for such delicately-nurtured and highly-refined ladies as the Misses Steele, but that an effort should be made to get her into a religious HOME. There, under the constant supervision and with the guidance of holy sisters, it was probable she might soon realise the enormity of her offences, and be brought into a proper state of repentance for her sin.

"You mean a penitentiary!" cried Clare, her beautiful eyes flashing, her lips and her clenched hands trembling, in a very agony of passionate revolt.

"You may call the Christian home, which I most considerately suggest to you, by any

name you please, Miss Redmond. Your insolence does not alter the kindness of my intention."

Thus, with the frigid serenity of conscious rectitude, spoke Mrs. Steele.

Red wrath and shrill remonstrance never became her; indeed, she was apt to appear ridiculous when angry. But to-day she was moved beyond her wont, and she turned pale. Her speech was not turbulent, but measured and incisive.

Clare listened with bated breath and a failing heart. Never had she known Mrs. Steele so impressive. She actually began to doubt her own innocence, seeing this stern white woman so thoroughly persuaded of her guilt.

Viewing the "situation" from a dramatic standpoint, it certainly was a pity that Mrs. Steele marred the success of her dignified "entry" by a lapse into the old familiar

nagging tone. She could not resist another cutting allusion to the sinful levity which lured Lord Verstrume into publicly compromising Clare and himself before the amazed eyes of the virtuous parent of those poor innocent darlings Cecilia and Amalia.

It was after this parting thrust that Clare (according to Mrs. Steele's account) became insolent, and received notice to quit at the end of a week.

Having thus brought matters to the climax she had striven for, ever since her dear Harold's departure, Mrs. Steele and her eldest daughter went off to a dinner-party.

Miss Cecilia naturally felt much aggrieved. Her rising hopes of personal aggrandisement had just received a very rude check; but it was some consolation to remember that all the blame rested on the shoulders of that wicked, forward Clare. And further comfort was to be had in the certainty of the ini-

quitous governess's speedy dismissal from Hyde Park Place.

All the fault was on Clare's side, of course. His lordship had only proved weak and thoughtless, as all men are apt to be when unduly tempted by—designing women.

Mr. Steele, who, as usual, was completely ignorant of any domestic disturbance, took his pet Amy off to the theatre, as he had previously volunteered to do, and thus Clare's only chance of redress was lost to her.

She had already made up her mind to put her case calmly and truthfully to Harold's father, and only remembered when Amy came up to bid her a hurried good-night that she would be left quite alone this evening.

Alone with her grief and the crushing sense of her bitter humiliation.

"Oh Harold, my darling, my darling, my own true love; if you could only know,

if you could see how wretched, how helpless, how miserable I am!" sobbed the poor girl, as she flung herself on the bed in her little room, and found some relief for her intolerable suffering in a flood of passionate tears. "Oh Harold, why don't you come home? Why are you not here to save and deliver me?"

Idle questions, vain imaginings. Harold was over a thousand miles away, sailing on the Pacific. Spring sunshine overhead, spring sunshine in his heart, as he thought of the time coming nearer and nearer when he should meet his true love again.

Little recked he that chill autumn winds were blowing about the parental home in London, and that his unhappy love was crying to him for help and comfort in the bitter hour of her utter desolation.

Mrs. Steele had been very careful to conceal the sailor's whereabouts, his prospects,

his future destination, and imminent return from Clare. Indeed, she had shown a jealous persistency in her reticence as to her son's affairs, which was worthy of a better cause.

He, for his part, had faithfully kept the promise so reluctantly made. He had never written a letter to Clare; but had consoled himself for this hardship by interspersing his epistles to his mother with exhaustive messages to his betrothed.

Needless to state that not one of those words of love and encouragement were ever repeated to her, for whom they were all intended. But with a refinement of cruelty of which only women seem capable, his "complete silence" on the subject of Clare was frequently commented on by Mrs. Steele and her amiable daughter in the governess's presence.

"It does seem extraordinary that he has so

entirely forgotten her," said Mrs. Steele; and Cecilia replied, "His love was only boyish folly from first to last, of course."

Clare heard and heeded every one of those treacherous comments; but the memory of her lover's last embrace, the sight of the ring he had then given her, had never failed to reassure her as yet.

To-night, however, when the misery of her existence in the house of Harold's parents had come to a climax, all the hard things she had heard recurred to her, and she herself began to believe what others had so persistently endeavoured to teach her.

Her lover must have forgotten her. If that were not the case, she surely should not suffer as she was suffering now. When she had come to this distressing conclusion, she passionately pressed her lips upon that ring, his parting gift, and wondered if it were true that men were never faithful to their vows,

and that only to women it is given to love for ever.

Ah, surely, surely Harold was an exception to that condemning rule of fickleness! He had been, he still was, loyal and true. If only she might look into his loving eyes once more, and hear the welcome tones of his encouraging voice! Then all her doubts and fears would vanish as mists before the clear light of the rising sun.

"Ah, Harold, Harold!"

She cried his name aloud again, as though he must hear her appeal at last. And then she became more tranquil, and began to reason.

He had been away so long now, his return surely could not be very far off. Any day might bring him back—to-night, to-morrow. He had said, with his happy laugh, "I shall turn up one fine morning when you least expect me."

Should she summon her courage to her aid and endeavour to endure with patience a little longer—until he really came home to her—at last?

But suddenly the threat of the penitentiary sounded in her ears with deafening iteration, and she remembered, with a rousing start, that she had received notice to quit at the end of a week. She was to be turned out—to be sent forth into the wilderness of this great mysterious London, the wickedness of which formed the staple of conversation above stairs and below—she was to seek a new mode of existence for herself, and the door of Harold's home would be closed to her for ever.

That was the gruesome aspect of affairs as regarded the future; but worse even than that were the present anxieties pressing upon her—fear of Mrs. Steele and the threatened penitentiary, horror and loathing of further

attentions from that odious Lord Verstrume—Oh, it was hard, too hard, to be borne!

She sprang to her feet to escape from her maddening thoughts in hurried movement, and she paced restlessly to and fro. Suddenly a mode of escape occurred to her, the only way possible out of all the difficulties surrounding and threatening her. She must run away—run away and hide herself so effectually that neither Mrs. Steele nor his lordship could ever find her again.

Sooner or later she would have to face the world. It was surely wiser and better to do so now, while she had power to act after her own free-will, than to await the hour when it should suit her hard-hearted mistress to bid her go.

Clare has a will of her own, and, having made a resolution, feels herself thoroughly able to carry it out at all hazards. There must

be an end to regret and further hesitation at once. Half the difficulties of life shrink away from a fearless and resolute encounter. That was one of the "golden maxims" impressed upon her by the kind eccentric old tutor who had lodged in her father's house, and had taught her, as well as Harold, so kindly, so patiently, so well.

If he were alive she could go straight to him now and ask for shelter, help, comfort, and advice; but he is dead, alas! and she had not even been allowed to go and nurse him in his mortal sickness, as he had begged her to do. Mrs. Steele had harshly refused her petition for one week's absence—another grievance against Mrs. Steele, the sudden remembrance of which fires Clare's blood.

She starts to her feet, and resolves to pack up at once.

In the course of years she has managed to

change the bare attic set apart for her use into a dainty bower. She has knitted curtains for the bed and the window, and has looped them up with knots of pretty ribbon. She has skilfully concealed the sharp outline of deal table, chairs, and chest of drawers by covers of patch or crewel work. She has repapered the ugly walls with "supplements" and other illustrations, many of them coloured by herself. Amy, who is really still a child, and not a badly-disposed one, has contributed all sorts of pictures and "pretties" for decorative purposes, and has frequently elected to assist Clare in the arrangement of her little room. As Clare looks around it now she remembers Amy's occasional attentions gratefully. There has been so little else than hardship in her life at Hyde Park Place that every glimpse of pleasantness has made a lasting impression; therefore she takes Amy's photograph down

from the wall. "That shall go with me," she decides.

She possesses a small leather travelling-bag, a parting gift of the old schoolmaster's. That will hold all that it is necessary for her to take away, all that she has the right to consider her own. First of all, her books. The collection is a small and a very odd one. Longfellow's "Poems," "Queechy," Emerson's "Representative Men," a Latin Grammar, Mangnall's "Questions," a Church Service, and a spelling dictionary. These are carefully bestowed in the bag; then follow her linen, designs and materials for work, a small tin paint-box and a housewife—very precious this, for it was Harold's first gift in the old Torchester days. His picture in its neat leather-case, and the purse containing all her savings, she carefully hides in the bosom of her plain black gown; and now—she is ready.

The bag, though small, is heavy; but her heart is lighter already. She will bear the yoke of slavery no longer. She is all alone in the world, homeless, forsaken, but—free.

CHAPTER II.

ADRIFT.

Then black despair,
The shadow of a starless night, was thrown
Over the world in which I moved alone.

CLARE does not pause now. Her preparations are complete. She has knelt beside her bed for a moment and has breathed a hurried but a fervent prayer for help and guidance in the strange life of adventure on which she is about to embark. She prays that she may be forgiven if she is doing wrong. She prays that she may ever be true to her darling, and that they may meet again, if not in this world, then in the next.

It is a childlike prayer, and is uttered in the spirit of a simple childlike faith. It has certainly fortified her who utters it; and she moves to the door with firm unhesitating steps. Her long dark waterproof completely envelops her figure, a close black bonnet and a thick veil cover her head and face. She pauses for a moment on the landing. It is nine o'clock—the hour for the servants' supper. They are not likely to be moving about at so important a moment.

On the stairs she pauses again—shall she go out at the hall-door, or creep farther down and escape through the area?

No; she dares not pass the servants'-hall, they might hear her; and question or delay at this moment would utterly unfit her for the task she has set herself.

So she glides swiftly and noiselessly down the front stairs, crosses over the

tesselated pavement of the hall, approaches the door, and finds, with a sigh of relief, that it is not bolted; but left on the latch ready for Mr. Steele's key, when Amy and he return.

Where will she be by that time?

A moment later she is outside the door, standing upon the step in new perplexity. If she pulls the door to after her, the servants must hear, and will come up to see what has happened. This is a risk she dares not run; so she chooses the lesser of two evils, and makes her escape while she can, leaving the house to take care of itself, with its door ajar.

She runs down the steps, and hurries along the pavement; in her excitement she cannons against the postman; but he is too busy sorting letters, by the feeble gleam of his bull's-eye, to heed her at all.

"He will give the alarm when he knocks

at our open door," she thinks, and redoubles her pace.

That postman holds a letter in his hand at this moment, which announces Harold's proximate return.

Jackson, Mrs. Steele's confidential maid, is coming up from her supper when the postman knocks at the open door.

"Mercy upon us!" cries the abigail, with a start that almost upsets the tray she is carrying, the tray containing Miss Clare's supper.

Jackson had volunteered to take it upstairs herself to-night, not from any desire to oblige the housemaid, whose duty it is to wait upon the governess, nor with a view to pleasing that young lady by the delicate attention; but only to try and glean some information at head-quarters of the row-royal which had occurred this after-

noon, and of which Jackson has as yet heard Miss Cecilia's version only.

"Rather dangerous leaving your door open on such a foggy night, miss," says the postman; "you'll find yourself carried off in the dark one of these times if you don't mind."

"Maybe I shouldn't if the right man came to fetch me," says Jackson, promptly, and the busy man pursues his rat-tat rounds with a passing smile of appreciation. From the top of the kitchen-stairs Jackson argues the point of that open door with the servants below. Cook says she wonders if anythink is took out of the umbreller-stand; and John the footman comes up, and is reassured by personal investigation.

Jackson and the supper arrive without further adventure on the third-floor landing. There is no response to the knock at the door of Miss Clare's room.

Suppose she's in bed and asleep by this," the maid concludes, and feels very indignant at being balked of the gossip she had promised herself; but is soon consoled by a reflection which savours of the sourness of the proverbial fox's grapes. "Not that I'd even try to talk to that girl," thinks Jackson; "for I never can get on with her, she's that stuck-up she makes one feel quite silent like. Just as though a nursery-governess was worth any more than a lady's-maid; certainly not to judge by her clothes. Bah! —that poor sort of pride is disgusting. I'm not going to stand knocking at your door all night, miss. I'll set your supper down, and if you don't choose to eat it you may starve, for all I care."

Jackson sets the tray down on the floor, and concludes that Miss Clare—miss, indeed! —has most likely cried herself to sleep, for she is no doubt utterly crushed by the

wrath she has provoked to-day. "Now, if she were more friendly-like, and would talk to me about the missis and her doings sometimes, I should go straight into her room now, and tell her whose letter has just come; but as things are, she'll just have to do without knowing anything from me about her young man. Her young man, indeed! Why, I might as well be setting my cap at Mr. Maurice—and a deal better I look in my new cap with the blue ribbons than ever she could with her hair all plain, and just put up in a lump at the back of her neck."

* * * * *

"Have you seen anything of Miss Clare this evening, Jackson?" asks Mrs. Steele, while her maid is undressing her.

Jackson remarks the absence of asperity in her mistress's tone as she asks the question, and sagely concludes that "a some-

thing" in Master Harold's letter has softened his mamma's feeling towards the governess at the moment.

"I took up her supper myself, ma'am," says the maid, making much of a condescension which, in Mrs. Steele's present mood, is likely to be appreciated; "and I asked cook for a little something extra, because Miss Clare didn't touch a morsel at tea-time; but I do believe she had gone to bed at nine o'clock, for she never answered when I knocked at her door; so I put the tray down without disturbing her."

"Just go up and see if she has taken it in now, Jackson. Though she has behaved very badly—most ungratefully—I do not wish her to starve."

The very excellent dinner of which Mrs. Steele had partaken this evening may have enlarged her sympathies to some extent; and the long affectionate epistle from her

darling sailor-boy, who held the first place in her heart, had decidedly softened her mood.

He was coming back—he would be at home in eight or ten weeks. Clare's abrupt dismissal must be condoned, a compromise should be effected. If Harold came home unexpectedly, and found the girl had been turned out, he might be led into some rash act which no subsequent regret could undo. This risk must be avoided at all hazards; and therefore Clare should be talked to, severely admonished, reminded of the insecurity of her position, and allowed to remain under certain restrictions, and with closer supervision.

As Mrs. Steele comes to this eminently satisfactory decision, Jackson returns with hasty steps and a frightened air.

"She is gone, ma'am!" she cries, breathless. "She has took her bonnet and cloak

and her leather-bag; her books is gone, and the room's cleared out; and she's eat no supper, and she's gone!"

Mrs. Steele stares incredulously.

"Gone! Don't talk nonsense, Jackson. Where should she go to? She has not a friend in the world."

But when Jackson tells the story of the open hall-door, Mrs. Steele becomes alarmed.

"The girl is a thief, no doubt," she says, rushing at the most detrimental inference; and mounts the steep stairs with amazing alacrity.

But the girl had taken nothing that was not her own; even the cast-off clothes which Cecilia had bestowed upon her from time to time were left in the drawers and on the pegs. She had worn the black gown and cloak bought out of her own salary, and had

left no letter or trace of any kind to tell how she had gone, or where.

Mrs. Steele's impressions on that subject she very freely communicated to Maurice in their subsequent interview; but to Harold, when he came home, she did not dare to say one derogatory word. His grief and rage alarmed and silenced her, and a breach was created between mother and son which even time seemed unlikely to bridge over.

* * * * *

Clare, knowing little, and caring less, in what direction she turned her steps, so they but led her away from the park and the squares and the terraces familiar to her, presently found herself in a large, crowded, and very noisy thoroughfare. She thought this must be the Edgware Road; but she had never seen it at night, and scarce recognised its altered aspect.

What a noise and roar and bustle! How rudely the people jostle and push as they tramp along over the muddy pavement!

It is Saturday night—the night of the people, *par excellence*; and the people themselves, happy in the fresh possession of the hardly-earned week's wage, rejoice in the fact as much as do the vendors of miscellaneous goods, who are lauding their wares and inviting purchasers in every variety of words, tones, and manner. The hoarse croak of the itinerant apothecary, who recommends lozenges warranted to cure the most obstinate form of cough, catarrh, or bronchitis, makes a bass second to the shrill piping of the lad who solicits the purchase of popular songs, comic and mee-lo-dra-matic, novel editions of which are temptingly displayed upon the board he carries before him like a tray.

"Two boxes of my famous lozenges for a penny, sir — only a penny, miss; now

don't let your chance go by!" croaks the quack.

"'Our fire is out, and we've got no more coal!'" sings the boy, quoting the first line of the ballad he holds in his hand. "Quite a new song—a new song and a fine song; provoking of laughter and ending in tears—and all for a penny, sir; who'll buy, who'll buy?"

Lozenges and songs are *articles de luxe*; but there are dozens of barrows, carts, and stalls, furnished with every variety of comestible, and generally useful, goods. Vegetables are arranged in artistic pyramids, and vociferously recommended as "All fresh—all fresh—gathered this morning, ma'am. A penny a lot; only one penny the lot!"

The nimble penny certainly plays an important part on the occasion of these Saturday markets, which may be termed the saturnalia of the costermonger, and which are held in

six or seven of the chief thoroughfares of poor overcrowded London districts.

Some of the sellers coax, others seem to threaten. All are eager; most of them lie—like the lawyers—professionally of course.

Meat can be bought at these hebdomadal markets at about half the price asked either in shops or stores. The penny bloater is always in considerable request. Jugs, plates, cups, and saucers may be had in oddly-assorted lots, at prices varying from threepence to one-and-ninepence. For the latter sum you might store a china-closet.

Women's dresses and jackets, silk or other, are offered at half-a-crown a-piece—"As good as new, ma'am, quite as good as new." Boots, roughly repaired with blackened calico, can be purchased for one-and-nine a pair—"Only one-and-nine, ma'am, only one-and-nine, and quite as useful as new ones at seven-and-nine

a pair. Only one-and-nine—only one-and-nine—buy!"

That one-and-nine is evidently considered a most imposing sum by dealer as well as purchaser.

Clare allows herself to be carried on and on by the rough pushing crowd. She can find no amusement in the bargaining and hurry-scurry of the market. The mob frightens her, and it all seems repulsive, terrible. She feels very weary, and longs for a little quiet, a little rest.

Her bag is very heavy; but she holds it securely, and is thankful to know it is hidden within the folds of her ample cloak. Her money is safe too. Sometimes she touches the purse where it lies concealed in the bodice of her grown.

The shouts of the people, the sellers and the sold—those who drive bargains and

those who are drunk—all this babble and discord bewilder and deafen her.

No food has passed her lips since midday; she begins to feel very faint.

Shall she never reach the end of this surging noisy crowd?

Ah, here at the cross-roads it seems to bear away to the right. Now she can escape from the hurrying throng. Straight ahead, in front of her, the street is comparatively quiet, and she can walk along this broad pavement untroubled and unchecked.

With a sigh of relief she quickens her pace, walking steadily on and on. The road widens and improves. To the right and the left are substantial houses of the size and pretension which justify the title of "mansion" in the advertisements. Most of them stand in square gardens, the wide gates of which abut on the pavement.

Clare wanders on and on. She hears a

church-clock in the distance striking ten. Where shall she find a lodging for the night? Who will give her shelter and a bed? She is a stranger in London—knows very few of the streets by name, and nothing of the life that is led in them.

She has come to the end of the broad prosperous-looking road now. The houses are less pretentious, and are built in rows or terraces. She sees a brilliantly-illuminated public-house on the opposite side of the street. She crosses over, intent on a closer inspection. It is evidently a rendezvous for omnibuses; several are drawn up in front, or along a street at the side. Some are turning their passengers out, others are preparing for a new journey townwards. Drivers, conductors, travellers—all are bustling, all are wanted somewhere, all have some task to perform. She alone is idle, helpless, forsaken; no one heeds, no one is waiting for, no one wants her.

She is standing at the edge of the curb now, reading the lettered advertisements on the bright windows of the public-house.

Hotel — Private entrance — Good beds— Fine Old Tom—Bass's ales—Scotch and Irish whiskies.

Shall she ask for a bed there? Why not? Hotels are intended for homeless travellers. She is certainly a traveller, and this purports to be an hotel. But even as she approaches a drunken woman flounders out of the swinging door, and stumbles helplessly against Clare. Recovering her balance, the woman breaks into a shrill torrent of violent abuse, and threatens Clare with her savagely-clenched fists the while. Men and boys approach, eager to hear what the row is about, most of them anticipating and delighted at the prospect of a fight between two "gals."

Clare, trembling in every limb, terrified

beyond measure, flies across the road again, and runs on and on as fast as her feet will carry her.

She has managed to evade the virago; no one is pursuing her. At last she pauses at the corner of a by-street, breathless.

There is a shop at this corner — a small shop — known to its frequenters as "Mrs. Dixon's all sorts." It merits the comprehensive title; for Mrs. Dixon does sell everything — mixed sweets, shag, lemonade, ginger-beer, bloaters, fresh eggs, and new milk. A ticket in the window arrests Clare's attention: "A Bedroom to Let."

She enters the shop.

"A glass of new milk, if you please."

"I suppose you can take it out of a mug?" says Mrs. Dixon, who has a sharp face, a sharper voice, and wears a very black cap of the shape known as "widow's."

She is cross and tired just now; desirous of her supper, and vexed by the sight of detaining customers.

"Thank you," says Clare, and drinks the milk with evident relish. She was sinking for want of nourishment, and is most thankful for the restoring draught. "You have a room to let?" she asks timidly; and lifts her veil that the woman may see her face, for she has remarked the dubious glances with which that masklike veil has been regarded. "Could you take me in for the night? I am alone in London, and have nowhere to go."

Another woman enters the shop at this moment. She is stout, and looks good-tempered. She wears a bonnet with bright ribbons, and a handsome India shawl. She peers inquisitively out of her small black eyes, first at Clare and then at Mrs. Dixon.

She has heard the girl's timid question, and is waiting for the shopkeeper's reply.

"Take you in? Lor', no; we only takes respectable lodgers — artisans and such-like; you're a deal too handsome to be about the streets alone at night. Carrying a lady's travelling-bag, too! You're up to no good, I warrant. You'll get a bed to suit you at the coffee-house further up Kilburn way."

Clare pauses for a moment in miserable perplexity.

"I am so tired and so hungry," she says. "I will pay for my bed and my supper, of course. Oh, don't send me out into the streets again, please!" and she covers her face with her hands and bursts into tears.

The comely matron, who has by this time received the two bottles of lemonade she had asked for, looks compassionately at the sobbing girl.

"Don't fret, my dear," she says soothingly. "You come along o' me. I live just across the road in them villas, and I daresay I can put you up for the night. Have you got any money?"

"How much would you want?" asks Clare, brightening.

"Well, as it's late, and a unusual sort of thing, I couldn't take less than a half-crown, my dear."

Clare has taken the precaution to put some loose silver in her pocket, so she does not show the purse which contains the bulk of her savings; but hands half-a-crown to the woman, who winks exultingly at Mrs. Dixon and leads the way across the road. Her house is the first of a row of two-storied dwellings known as Pomona Villas.

"My name is Mrs. Foley, my dear," says the owner of No. 1, opening the door with a latchkey.

Clare stands in the narrow hall waiting.

"Come in, come in, my dear," cries Mrs. Foley, who has gone into the parlour, and is lighting the gas, which flares up and shows every corner of the little room.

It is of the kind best described by the odious but expressive term "semi-genteel."

The furniture is covered with red rep. There is a sofa at one end, a chiffonier at the other. A small fire is feebly struggling in the narrow grate, and Mrs. Foley attacks it with a vigorous poker.

"We'll soon make the place look a bit more cheerful," she says. "Sit down, my dear, and make yourself at home."

Clare obediently sits down, but she cannot feel very much at home.

Mrs. Foley spreads a white cloth over the table, walks to and fro between it and the chiffonier, and is evidently commencing preparations for supper.

"I'm not a regular lodging-house-keeper, you must know, my dear," she says, while she places knives, forks, glasses, and castors upon the table. "I purchases wardrobes. Ladies and gents waited upon at their own residences. No shop, you see—that keeps the business private; and the ladies prefer that, and so do the gents. Since I have took this little house, I find I can accommodate a few lodgers too. We all has our meals together, and that makes it cheerful like, you see. I am of what folks call a social turn. I always was fond of pleasant company, and gets on best with young people. The girls that live with me know me well, and trust me accordin'. We never have no secrets here; it's much easier to speak out. They tells me all their little affairs, business and private both. I hearkens to 'em, and then I give my advice. I know the world and the ways of it for better as for worse; and I warns

'em accordin' to my experience, which has been a pretty extensive one, I can assure you. Will you have a glass of sherry, my dear, or will you wait till supper-time?"

Clare preferred to wait. Mrs. Foley, declaring herself "that faint," partook liberally of the sherry, and went on talking incessantly. She was becoming exceedingly anxious to hear some account of this remarkably handsome, timid, and silent young lady; but something in Clare's manner forbade impertinent inquiry.

"She's been frightened, and wants courage to speak out," concluded Mrs. Foley. "If I begin by telling her all about the other girls she'll come to talking about herself quite natural like. Strangers often want a little coaxing."

With this intention Mrs. Foley continued her prattle.

"It's Miss Purkiss has taught me to

know the goodness there is in brown sherry," she says. "It does as much for me as brandy, and being only wine there's no harm in it. Miss Purkiss is one of the finest singers at the Cosmopolite Music Hall up our road. She's not home yet; but she won't be much after eleven. The moment she comes in, 'Lemon and sher, Foley,' she says. That's what I bought them bottles of lemonade for to-night. Singing does try the chest so, my dear; and Miss Purkiss says it always gives her a sort of sinking."

"It must be very trying," says Clare, feeling that she is expected to make some response.

"Ah, trying it may be," assents Mrs. Foley; "but there, it is only singing after all. Now the real hard work is in the ballet. There's Miss Flower—Mam'sell Fleurette she's called in the bills—she had a hard time of it, if you like; and such corns, poor girl! The

most of them is ready to scream with the agony of their corns."

"And is Miss Flower staying with you also?" asks Clare, anxious to pretend to some interest, though really far too tired to feel any at all.

"No; she's just left me and the Hall too; she has gone off with a gent as means to make her his lady-wife—so he's told her at least, and she believes him, no doubt. It's the way of young girls to believe the men; and it's the way of all men to tell lies when they're in love."

Clare makes a movement; it is scarcely perceptible; but those watchful eyes have observed it. Crossed in love, concludes Mrs. Foley. I thought as much. "The most important thing for Miss Flower, after all, is the present," she says, with emphasis. "What does by-and-by matter to her or any of us? Sir Danby Brough is the gentleman's

name; he's a tip-top swell, and he's providing very handsome for her at present, so her room's vacant, and you can have that for to-night, and to-morrow we'll see how we get on. I suppose you're in the theatre too; but you don't dance or sing—you're too quiet for that. Is the drama your line? You look like Maud Fanshawe, who takes the walking-lady at Clark's, you know. Have you gone off in a huff with your manager, or what has happened, to send you out in the streets like this? You're a very handsome girl, you know—Mrs. Dixon spoke the truth there—and it's pecooliar to see such a pretty creature as you with no home to go to."

"I wish I was not pretty," says Clare, indignant tears filling her eyes again. "If it hadn't been for what people call my beauty, I might have been allowed to stay at home in peace and comfort, and lived on as quietly

and contentedly as other poor girls do, instead of——"

"Oh, was they jealous of you, my dear? It's always the way at theatres as well as at halls; but you shouldn't have minded that. You should just have give them as good as they gave you, and then have run off with the richest man you could find—not all by yourself like, as if no one cared to trouble about you."

Clare looks at Mrs. Foley in dismay. What sort of house is this she has come to? Perhaps the woman's ignorance leads her to say things she cannot mean in the sense in which Clare understands them.

"I have never been on the stage," she says, after a few minutes' uncomfortable pause, "nor do I know anything at all about theatres or actresses, or dancers or singers. All I can do is needlework. To-morrow I will show

you some specimens, and perhaps you can manage to dispose of some of my best pieces. I was nursery-governess in a family, and I found I had to leave my home quite suddenly, quite unexpectedly. Indeed, I only came away to-night" ("Can it really have been to-night?" thinks Clare; it seems a week ago since she stole down the stairs in Hyde Park Place), "and now I must earn my bread as best I can." She is not demonstrative by nature, and is herself surprised at the tears which again fill her eyes and choke her utterance. "Will you allow me to go to bed now?" she entreats, in a broken voice. "I am so tired and so unhappy. I will try to give you a more satisfactory account of myself in the morning; but I would so much rather not meet any more strangers to-night."

"Just as you please, my dear; just as you please," says Mrs. Foley. "This is Liberty

Hall, you know. You've paid for your bed, and you have the right to go to it as soon as you please. But you'll have a bit of supper first, won't you now? 'Ere, take a crust and a bit of cheese with you."

Clare accepts the plate which is offered her, and follows Mrs. Foley, who leads the way up the steep narrow stairs to the room at the back of the second floor. The room is small, the furniture of the simplest, not to say roughest, description; but the bed looks inviting. The sheets are coarse, but they are certainly clean. The near prospect of getting into that bed fills Clare with thankfulness.

"I am sure I shall be very comfortable, and I am very much obliged to you," she says, in grateful response to Mrs. Foley's "Good-night."

To be alone, peaceful, and at rest for this night at least, is at this moment the *summum bonum* for the weary, broken-spirited, heart-

sick girl. Her hostess retires vexed and grumbling; she is annoyed and disappointed to find that her new lodger is bent on seeking solitude so early this evening. She had desired to trot out her handsome prize for the benefit of Miss Purkiss and her "young man," who mostly drops in to share his lady-love's supper when she returns from her labours at the "Cosmopolite Hall."

Fortunately for Clare, she knows nothing of Mrs. Foley's discontent, nor of the protracted supper, the steaming punch, and the impromptu rehearsal of a new scena on the part of the singer; nor is she disturbed by the knowledge of the startling romances invented on her behalf by her loquacious and imaginative hostess. She has securely locked and bolted the door of her little chamber, poor child, and, too utterly exhausted to think, or weep, or pray, soon sinks into a profound and dreamless slumber.

CHAPTER III.

PURSUIT.

Love like a shadow flies, when substance love pursues:
Pursuing that that flies, and flying what pursues.

THE deep heavy sleep which is the natural consequence of complete mental and physical prostration is not refreshing.

Clare awakes with a start next morning; but she still feels drowsy and stupid, and gazes about the strange room in which she finds herself in a bewildered unrecognising way. But after a while she remembers all

that happened to her on that most miserable and eventful yesterday.

All?

Yes; her struggle with that horrid Lord Verstrume, the scene with Mrs. Steele, the rude noisy crowd in the Edgware Road, the virago outside the public-house, Mrs. Dixon's sharp features and sharper words—all the trials which came upon her, as unexpectedly as a thunderclap, recur to her now with most depressing realism.

She hears no one stirring in the house where she had found shelter when her despair had reached a climax; but the church-bells outside are ringing a cheerful invitation.

It must be very late. She rises hastily, afraid Mrs. Foley will be annoyed by her apparent laziness. As Clare remembers her hostess's round red face, her coarse speech and coarser laughter, as she recalls the frequently-replenished wineglass, and subsequent

alteration of voice and manner, she shudders at the prospect of meeting that landlady again.

But Mrs. Foley supping, exhilarated, and communicative on Saturday night, is a very different person from Mrs. Foley drowsy, depressed, and "altogether out of sorts," as she declares herself to be, this Sunday morning.

Miss Purkiss does not appear at breakfast, which consists of strong tea and very salt bloaters. Mrs. Foley partakes liberally of both. She always feels "a sort of sinking" in the morning, she explains to Clare, who with unmistakable amazement is watching her pour brandy into her second cup of tea. "And that sort of faint sensation is only got over by a taste of old brandy, which gives a fillip to one's nervous system." This she adds in a tone of apology. Clare watches and listens in silence; the matutinal aspect of her hostess is by no means reassuring, nor does the first

view of Mrs. Foley's maid (of all work) give the stranger any satisfaction. The poor slavey (how well the term applies to dirty Liz!) looks as though her life was spent in a coal-cellar or a dust-hole. Clare thinks of prim neat Jackson and of pretty pert Betty the housemaid at Hyde Park Place, and remembers their specially dapper appearance on Sunday mornings, when the work of the house was always performed with extra alacrity, to enable the maids to get away in good time for church.

Clare would like to go to church this morning; but is restrained from suggesting such a proceeding by fear. The possibility of meeting Lord Verstrume in the streets haunts and terrifies her. He drives about all over London, and at all hours, as she knows well by her late painful experience; for he has been in the habit of waylaying and following her to church for some months past. She has

occasionally gone to Westminster Abbey, to attend afternoon service, and no sooner had she glided into one of the hospitably open seats there than she discovered his lordship in her immediate vicinity. He haunted her as cruel Mephisto tormented Gretchen, and rejoiced in her evident discomfort with truly satanical delight.

Clare has very vague ideas as to the relative position of Pomona Villas, the Marble Arch, and Hyde Park Place; but she is quite aware that she must avoid the latter points of the metropolitan compass. Before she ventures forth, therefore, it will be prudent to satisfy herself as to her present whereabouts.

"Miss Purkiss says she'll have her breakfast took upstairs this morning; she don't feel well enough to come down." Dirty Liz vouchsafes this information, looking in undisguised amazement at the new lodger the while; and when she arrives upstairs with

Miss Purkiss's tea, she informs that young lady that missis's new girl is a rare one. "She don't speak," says Liz, "but she just sits and looks straight afore her with the biggest and sorrowfullest eyes, like Dr. Clarkson's big brown dog did the day before he was run over. Do you remember, Miss Purkiss?"

"You're a fool, Liz," says Miss Purkiss. "Don't bother me; I want another hour's sleep, for I've company coming to-night."

"Well, you haven't much to say for yourself this morning. Are you always so dull, or haven't you got out of last night's sulks yet? Why don't you talk a-bit?"

It is thus Mrs. Foley addresses her silent lodger, as she herself rises from the breakfast-table and pushes her chair away with a jerk. She looks indignant, and she speaks crossly.

Clare, who has been completely absorbed by her thoughts, is vexed with herself for the

inattention which has brought about such an unexpected rebuke.

"I am sorry if I appeared rude, Mrs. Foley," she says humbly. "I am really in great trouble about my immediate future. Will it be possible for me to remain here a few days longer? By the end of the week I shall hope to get some orders for work, and then I could look out for a situation or a permanent home of some kind. Meanwhile I hope I may stay with you."

"If you stay you'll have to pay. I suppose you are aware of that fact," says Mrs. Foley. "I has to earn my living, and I'm not exactly disposed to keep anyone out of charity. If you like to pay me two guineas down, you can have bed and board here until Monday week. That's the most reasonable I can do for you."

Mrs. Foley has taken the measure of Clare's worldly inexperience pretty accurately,

and is determined to make the girl pay dearly for any practical lesson she chooses to teach her.

"Do you think you can get me some orders for work, or will you dispose of things as I make them?" asks Clare timidly. "I can pay you the two guineas you require now; but I must earn some money before I incur any fresh debts." She takes her purse from its hiding-place and hands Mrs. Foley the two guineas without any further remark. Her calm dignity, her gentle acquiescence, perplex and irritate the shrewish landlady. She is accustomed to deal with vicious precocity; effrontery amuses her; copious libations and coarse jokes are the pleasure of her life; but Clare's subdued speech, her quiet movements, and serious questioning eyes discomfit and make her so restless that she presently goes to the door of the parlour and summons Miss Purkiss in a peremptory manner. It

will be quite a relief to hear Miss Purkiss's strident laugh, and watch her rough movements.

Presently the first singer of the Cosmopolite makes her appearance. She is a stout red-haired woman; and although it is now one o'clock, she has apparently not had time to complete her toilet. Her tangled locks are loosely coiled around a high comb; a flannel *peignoir* which may have been *couleur de rose* once, but is only coloured by age and grease now, clings in unbecoming folds to her portly figure. Clare glances at this yawning, lazily-stretching person with an astonishment nearly allied to disgust. Clare has the instincts of a gentlewoman; and the severe moral discipline, added to the excellent education inculcated by the eccentric but most devoted old tutor at Torchester, have tended to enlarge her views, but in nowise detracted from her natural womanly refinement. She

has of late experienced trouble and disappointment, poor girl; but until now she has never been brought into immediate contact with absolute vulgarity, with low unkempt womanhood, and she recoils instinctively. Mrs. Steele, with all her aspirations to appear as a fine lady, never soared above the level of what she herself would have described as "most genteel," nor did she descend to vulgarity. Her dress, though wanting in taste, was always good in quality and material, and all her surroundings, though not artistic, were as good as money could buy. Amidst this luxury Clare had grown up, and felt herself, thanks to the devotion of her betrothed, one of the family. With his sudden departure all had been miserably changed, of course; but though she had then commenced a life of comparative seclusion, she continued to breathe an atmosphere of refinement which seemed natural to her.

And now she suddenly finds herself in the company of a dealer in secondhand wardrobes, and of an unwashed, unkempt, loudly-bragging music-hall singer. How long can she endure this existence?

Anxious thoughts about the diminished store in that poor little purse of hers are beginning to torment her, the two guineas she has just paid have left her so very little to go on with.

On the Monday morning she shows Mrs. Foley some exquisite specimens of that artistic needlework in which she has long excelled. "Will you try to sell these pattern-strips for me, or get me some orders for similar work?" she asks.

Mrs. Foley is fairly taken aback at the beauty of colour and design in the specimens submitted to her. "I can make money out of this fine lady," she thinks; "and she's certainly far less trouble than Purkiss, though

never likely to be such good company. And I do like a girl I can talk to and laugh with. What shall I do about this business?"

Mrs. Foley is in a dilemma, for Miss Purkiss, in a violent fit of passion, has just declared to her landlady that either that stuck-up broomstick (Clare), with her mighty fine airs and graces, shall go out of the house, or she (Miss Purkiss) will leave, and at once.

The origin of Miss Purkiss's violent displeasure was jealousy, pure and simple. On the previous evening two "gentlemen" had appeared at Pomona Villas, and both had overtly bestowed far more attention on reticent unresponsive Clare than Miss Purkiss had been able to obtain for herself, in spite of her very evident efforts to please. It was a hard case for Miss Purkiss, since one of them was her own young man, the future husband of "the most successful lady vocalist of the day." And he had slighted his bride-elect for the sake of

that stuck-up wax doll, who hadn't a word to say for herself, and could only sit and stare out of those big brown eyes that looked like a hungry dog's. Barring the pathos, Liz's comments were just. The second visitor on that Sunday evening was one Mr. Joseph Samuels, who came on a matter of secondhand wardrobes, and intended to do business with Mrs. Foley; but who, seeing Clare in the parlour, remained for pleasure—the pleasure of staring the handsomest girl it had ever been his good luck to see out of countenance.

Next morning Miss Purkiss said to her landlady: "Either that girl or I must leave this house."

"She's paid more than double what you do, my dear," answered Mrs. Foley. "I've promised to keep her for another week; but, rather than you should be annoyed, I'll give her orders to keep upstairs in her own room while she is here. Then you and your friends

sha'n't ever be troubled with her interference no more. That I will promise you; so let matters be settled between us as comfortable as they was afore, won't you, my dear?"

From this time Mrs. Foley improvised a part for herself on the well-known lines of Mrs. Bouncer, in "Box and Cox." She naturally consulted her own interests in the first place. Then she turned her attention to reconciling the conflicting requirements of her antagonistic boarders.

Having temporarily pacified Miss Purkiss, whose pursuits and profession took her away from home during the greater part of the day and evening, Mrs. Foley turned her personal attention to the profitable disposal of Clare's silk broideries and elaborate crewel-work, specimens of which she took with her when she went off on her rounds. She sold two pieces for thirty shillings on the first day, and obtained high praises and a fresh order. She

paid the delighted worker ten shillings, keeping twenty shillings as her commission; and, finding this manner of doing business profitable, determined to make her industrious lodger as comfortable as circumstances would allow.

"In future it will be better and more convenient for you to work in your own room, my dear," Mrs. Foley suggested. "Liz shall make a fire up there, and bring your meals to you. That way you won't be worrited or disturbed, and you and Miss Purkiss won't ever meet, which is as well; singing does wear her so, you see, and it tries her temper a good bit too."

Clare accepted the revised conditions of her prolonged stay at Pomona Villas gratefully. Sufficient work to enable her to pay Mrs. Foley, and immunity from further personal encounter with that terrible Miss Purkiss, were all she desired. For the jealous wrath of that lady,

and the epithets she hurled at her unconscious and most innocent rival, had frightened Clare as much as the torrent of abuse bestowed upon her by that angry drunken woman in the street.

So Clare, having adopted the inoffensive title of "Miss Smith," stayed quietly on at Pomona Villas, spending the short days and the long evenings at work in her own room, dirty Liz (who was far nicer than she looked), waiting upon her with evident pleasure, and, in the course of a few weeks, yielding so far to Clare's good influence as to appear with clean hands and face, and looking quite neat in a plain linsey gown Clare's skilful fingers had fashioned for her out of a cast-off garment of Mrs. Foley. The faster Clare worked, the more exacting her task-mistress became. That did not trouble the girl; but what she bitterly resented was the fact of the landlady's connivance at the open admiration bestowed upon

her by that odious old Jew, Mr. Joseph Samuels, who, on two occasions, had the audacity to accompany Liz upstairs when she brought Miss Smith's supper-tray. He first offered Clare a remunerative position as his housekeeper, suggesting that she would keep an eye on the shop, and gloating over the prospect of all the good customers her handsome face and fine figure would attract.

"If you'd put on a second-hand gown, you'd show it off to that advantage," he said, "that the girls would think it was new."

On the second occasion Mr. Samuels persuaded Mrs. Foley to accompany him, and then he very seriously asked Clare to be his wife.

Acting on Liz's shrewd advice, Clare determined to put an end to this kind of persecution by refusing to begin a fresh order for work, until Mrs. Foley pledged herself as responsible for Mr. Samuels's future good conduct.

"Not but what you are very foolish, my dear," she assured Clare emphatically; "for the man is rich; he's doing a thriving business; he's admired you from the first; and he is ready and willing to make you a very good husband. His age makes it all the better for you, you see; old men are more easy to lead when once they are in love with a pretty girl, and that Joe Samuels certainly is with you."

This *page d'amour*, so unexpectedly opened before Clare's astonished eyes, startled and made her anxious again.

But Mrs. Foley, as soon as she saw that it would be detrimental to Clare's work to allow her to be interrupted, took means to prevent any further intrusions; and so the girl stayed on and on, her work paying for her board and lodging, how liberally she little knew; though Liz, who heard a good deal of what went on in the parlour, gave

her some startling hints on the subject. But she endured patiently, living in the hope of some day changing and bettering her position. With that object in view she ventured out at times, entered various shops, and solicited employment — a situation, or work of any kind. She would be delighted to make herself "generally useful," she said earnestly.

But there were seemingly insuperable objections which precluded such engagements. She was too young, she was too showy; quiet-looking girls were always preferred in respectable shops. She had better try for a barmaid's place, that sort of trade would suit her style; but she would want some new clothes before even a publican would take her in. That old merino gown of hers was terribly worn and patched and darned certainly.

Other shopkeepers curtly informed her

that as she had no experience of any kind of business it was not likely they would undertake the teaching of a stranger, who brought neither character nor recommendation. The girl felt they were right, and wandered away again, sorrow, not anger, in her heart.

There came a time, after some six weeks of this dreary existence, when poor Clare felt so crushed and troubled by the trials and disappointments which met her on every side, that the possibility of going to Mrs. Steele to ask for pardon and assistance occurred to her; but on the heels of such possibility came the awful remembrance of Lord Verstrume and of the threatened penitentiary. Then the poor girl impulsively concluded that it was better and safer for her to make the best of present hard circumstances—to do as much work for Mrs. Foley as

she could manage, and to look forward to better times, which the future must surely bring her.

But her good intentions, her courage, and her hopes were doomed to sudden and fatal collapse.

She had devoted three entire weeks to the completion of a masterpiece in crewel-work. It was a bronze-cloth table-cover, exquisitely embroidered with sunflowers in varying shades of amber, orange, and brown. Mrs. Foley had provided the materials according to a special order given her by one of her wealthiest patronesses, an actress, possessing a bijou residence in St. John's Wood, who had already paid the wardrobe-seller considerable sums for her *protégée's* "beautiful work."

"I shall certainly give you a sovereign for this, my dear, whatever Madame Rosie

pays me. Though she's the richest of all my customers, she's very keen at driving a bargain, I can tell you."

Clare accepted the sovereign with thanks. That Mrs. Foley received five guineas for the table-cover mattered nothing to her. She could at least purchase some useful material for herself now, and make a new dress-jacket and hat out of it. She was ashamed to cross the street, so shabby were her clothes.

"I shall set out at once to get myself a new gown," she informed Mrs. Foley, who was at that moment departing with the beautiful table-cover in her arms, and was therefore in very good humour.

Clare also sallied forth with unusual animation in her face and movements; the prospect of shopping, and obtaining a new dress for herself, pleasing her quite as much as it would any other woman.

Never since she had fled from Harold's

home had she felt in such good spirits as she did on this deliciously bright clear November morning. Dark and dull days had been plentiful of late, therefore this unwonted brightness within and without was the more thoroughly appreciated.

In one of the largest shops in Edgware Road, Clare saw a complete costume of dark serge, which suited her taste and her means. She had still two pounds left out of the fund she originally started with.

She tried on the serge garments, and found that they would require but little alteration, dress and *paletôt* fitted passably.

"If you can wait half an hour, miss," suggested the saleswoman, with a deprecating glance at the customer's shabby clothing, "you can put the new costume on here, and let us send your other dress (?) home." She was too well bred to use the words "old clothes;" but her tone conveyed her

meaning. "You intend to pay cash, I suppose?"

Yes; Clare intended to pay cash—to part with the last sovereign, almost with the last shilling, that poor little purse of hers contained; but she did not mention this distressing fact. Mrs. Foley would be sure to bring home a fresh order and new materials from Madame Rosie's to-day, and a fortnight's work would replenish the reduced exchequer.

At the end of a long half-hour she walked out of the draper's shop completely rehabilitated, and not in the least resenting the saleswoman's pithy comment: "Well, now you do look a perfect lady, miss."

"Fine feathers," thought Clare smiling, and wondered what Mrs. Foley would say. Should she be scolded for her prolonged absence during the precious daylight hours, which were the best for her fine work? If Madame Rosie had paid a good price for

the table-cover Mrs. Foley would be in the best of tempers; if not——

But what makes the girl's eyes dilate and her face blanch as she is about to turn from the main road into Pomona Villas?

She pauses with a start, for she sees a brougham standing at Mrs. Foley's gate; and she knows that conspicuous carriage and its owner only too well. The truth flashes across her in a moment. On several occasions Mrs. Foley has alluded to a certain rich Lord Feston, whom she always spoke of as a great friend of Madame Rosie's. She must have misunderstood the name—it was Verstrume, of course. And he has just seen that new table-cover, which is similar in design to one lately made for Mrs. Steele; and he has made inquiries, and now—he has discovered her hiding-place.

Alas, what shall she do?

She stands in hopeless perplexity, when

Liz touches her sleeve. The poor little maid has also just turned the corner, and is carrying a bottle of champagne in her arms.

"It's for an old gent," she exclaims breathlessly. "He told me to bring the very best, and he giv' me ten shillings. He must be rich—Oh my! And he has come after you, miss, and he and the missis is both in a rage because you was out so long. Wherever did you get all them brand-new clothes from?"

"Good-bye, dear good Liz! God will bless you for your kindness to me. I have only a shilling to give you; but take my other clothes when they are sent home. Don't, don't try to stop me—good-bye!" Clare almost gasps in her breathless fear and anxiety.

And, before Liz fully understands her meaning, Clare is already hurrying away, back into the main road—on and on—anxious only to put as much ground as possible between herself and her dreaded, detested pursuer.

CHAPTER IV.

WEARY.

The hands that reach through darkness, guiding men.

After a time Clare moderates her pace, but continues to walk steadily on and on. Her first endeavour is to get clear of that main road, which seems most fraught with danger, since Lord Verstrume would naturally drive that way when he leaves Pomona Villas. Therefore Clare determines to continue her wanderings westward.

That is a different direction from any she

has taken before. The neighbourhood is new and quiet. There are very few people in these scarce-finished streets; the rows and rows of houses, villas, terraces, and so-called "gardens" succeed one another in startling numbers, but with most wearisome monotony.

Clare begins to feel very tired and very hungry. She ate but little breakfast, and hours have passed since she set out upon her peregrination in such buoyant spirits this morning. She has walked past miles and miles of stuccoed erections now—a journey that must seem flat, stale, and unprofitable at all times. In her present state of miserable perplexity it seems as interminable as it is depressing.

Where can it lead her? What will be the end of all this purposeless wandering?

It is past three o'clock. The glory of the short November day is over. What will

become of her when night comes? She has no money, no watch, no jewellery. There is nothing she can dispose of, except—— , But no; it would be better to starve outright than to sell Harold's gift, the ring that says, "*For ever!*"

She peeps into her little purse. There is no coin of any kind left in it. That shilling which she pressed into poor Liz's unwilling hand was indeed her last. A penny would have bought her a glass of milk. Never before had she realised the immense value of one single penny. She feels so hungry. Shall she go into a baker's shop and beg for a piece of bread? She begins to wish she had her old clothes on again. A petition for alms would not have seemed incompatible with her late poverty-stricken appearance, but asking for charity in a new "travelling costume" would be preposterous. People would either laugh at or scorn her. Oh, if she could

have rescued her bag, her books, her specimens of work! But Fate had indeed been hard this time; for, in her desperate fear of that designing monster Lord Verstrume, she had been compelled to abandon all her small possessions, and with them her further chances of earning bread. Of what use is her ability to work, when she has neither materials nor designs to practise with?

She has paused at the corner of a street, and in her utter weariness is leaning against a blank wall. There is some relief in this position, and she so longs for rest. Her head aches with a throbbing, numbing pain; all her energy is spent; she fears her feet will carry her no farther—in any case where can she go?

Reader, has it ever occurred to you how absolutely alone a gentlewoman may be in the crowded streets of busy preoccupied London?

Clare wonders if she can summon sufficient

strength and resolution to drag herself a few miles farther, and get out into the country to-night.

In her wanderings she has crossed the Harrow Road. Harrow is a country place; she has heard Harold speak of the great boys' school there. Can she possibly reach Harrow to-night? She could ask for shelter, or at least for bread, at a modest cottage-door; but her heart quails before the thought of knocking at a conventional villa.

As she stands pondering thus, she hears the tinkling of a bell. The sound of bells always attracts her attention, for it carries her thoughts back to Torchester. The bell of the college-chapel at Torchester had just such a sound, and it always rang at the sunset-hour on the early-darkening winter days. The sounds she hears now seem to invite her. If she should find a church-door open, she may creep in and—rest.

She ascertains the direction whence the sound proceeds, and follows it.

Presently she finds herself in a narrow back-street, at the end of which is a red-brick building surmounted by a cross. She sees a few people straggling in. Suddenly the bell stops. Impelled by an impulse too comforting to need resistance, she also enters the building. They can but turn her out again. What will that matter? What can anything matter now? Her strength has forsaken her. She feels crushed and hopeless.

A young man, with a pale sad face, is reading prayers, or rather praying, for he needs no book. He knows that sorrowful confession of sin and weakness by heart.

Clare kneels down and prays also; for the moment her burden seems lightened. The common confession of helplessness—the thought that each one there present carries his or her own burden, and that one and all

are praying to the same beneficent Father for help, strength, and consolation—comforts her exceedingly, and makes her feel less desolate in her trouble.

The congregation is chiefly composed of women, and most of them sorrowful-looking women.

Clare shivers. The chill damp of the winter twilight seems to have penetrated her bones. It is only now, since she has entered the warm soothing atmosphere of the church, that she realises how bitterly cold she had felt without.

Beauty is not only a joy, but a consolation.

Unconsciously Clare is influenced by the delicate beauty of her present surroundings. The stone fretwork in the chancel, the carved-oak pulpit, the flowers on the altar, the evergreens about the font, appeal to her artistic eye and sense, and also to something far

deeper; for beneath this outward appearance Clare reads its spiritual meaning. She understands the moral loveliness of which this is but the outward symbol.

The prayers are over, the anthem is sung, the young man gives a very short sermon, and the service is at an end.

Clare watches a procession of men and boys filing from the altar and up the aisle.

How vividly it all recalls Torchester!

One of the boys has a round merry face, and crisp golden curls lie on his forehead and temples. Clare remembers another face that used to look smiling and bright like that. She falls upon her knees again; she hides her aching head in her hands, and stifles the sobs which are choking her.

That church is never closed. It is dedicated to St. Barnabas, "the son of consolation."

And is there any hour of the twenty-

four in which an aching heart may not require and long for peace and consolation?

So Clare kneels undisturbed, weeping and praying; ineffably sad, and yet much comforted.

If she could get speech with that sad-faced curate, she thinks she could summon up courage to tell him all her griefs, to ask him for advice and help. His face betrays suffering and sorrow; but it is neither cold nor unsympathetic as a sad young face too often is.

But when she rises from her knees she is alone. The congregation has dispersed, the curate has gone.

Only one old woman is left, who is feebly tottering towards the door at this moment. In the dim light she stumbles over a hassock.

In an instant Clare is beside her, supporting and leading her until she has crossed the threshold.

Oh, how chill is the air of the winter evening. Clare shivers as she meets it.

"You are cold, deary," says the old woman. "It is a bitter night; won't you come in and have a cup of tea with me? I live close by, in one of those little houses up the next turning."

Never did Clare taste such nectar as the cup of tea brewed by the poor old woman, who lives in one of the neat little almshouses in the adjoining street. She thanks the hospitable crone in words. She thanks God in her heart. And then she sets out again, prepared, she thinks, to face the cruel wintry blast, and whatever further trouble the night may have in store for her.

If things come to the very worst, she can come back in an hour or two, and beg the old woman for leave to sleep in a chair in her room. At present pride seals her lips. She dares not ask for shelter where

the comfort of food has been offered, and that warm cup of tea been so generously given.

"I have lost my way, and I have no money to give you; please tell me the name of this street," she says, as she takes her leave.

And she finds she has wandered to Chelsea, all *terra incognita* to her.

A bitter wind is blowing; cold wet sleet is driving into her face as she walks forth once more.

Where can she go now? What shall she do?

She will try to walk a little farther to get some life into her chilled limbs.

She refused bread when the old woman offered it to her. Now the gnawing pains of hunger torment her. Shall she return and beg for what she has just refused, or shall she creep back into the church again, and hide herself there until morning?

How bitterly, awfully cold is the night!

She walks faster and faster to rouse the circulation in her frozen feet.

Here is a long low building lying back from the road, and there is a narrow passage at the side of it. Shall she creep up that way? It may lead to some cottages—to some place where they will believe her honest, and will help her.

She can but return to the almshouses and her charitable old friend if no other shelter should be forthcoming.

She glides along the narrow passage, holding by the wall. She is trembling; she feels very weak and faint.

Yes; there are buildings at the back; they are not cottages. But there are no lamps, all looks dark and poor. Shall she find a door and knock?

As she approaches what seems like a door, she stumbles against a step; and in

trying to recover her balance, she sinks down upon the cold stone. The door is at her back now and supports her. She will sit here for a while and rest. She is sheltered from the bitter wind—that is well. She had no strength left to battle against it any further.

She feels very weary, very cold, very quiet. Is she going to die ?

The sleet has turned to snow. She watches the flakes coming down. She looks at the flakes on the ground.

A mist is before her eyes; the flakes on the ground seem to move upward now. She lifts her head wondering, and it falls forward with a jerk.

She knows no more.

CHAPTER V.

PERCY.

[illegible]

Very different is the real artist, Percy Hetherington, from the "cad" and "adventurer" poor Harold in his unreasoning despair imagined him.

Percy has excellent prospects—a fact which in itself lifts a man's head and puts a smile upon his face. He is the heir-elect of a wealthy bachelor uncle—young, handsome, talented, very generous, but also very

extravagant. The soul of honour, as men of the world count honour; given to flirting, and always ready to meet a coquette half-way. He offers his heart, and bestows flowers, compliments, and attentions with unsparing liberality wherever he finds such gifts are appreciated; but he is far too much in love with himself and his liberty to dream of curtailing it by wearing fetters matrimonial.

In spite of these frivolous attributes, he is a good and devoted son to his widowed mother. And she, dear lady, regards Percy as the light of her eyes, and the incarnation of manly beauty and virtue. In this conviction her brother, the wealthy colonial merchant, Monsieur Bacchelier, fully concurs; and these two old people, who have reached the winter of human life, still find some of "spring's delights" in watching the bright youth of the son and nephew both love and admire so heartily. Though not the Adonis

his fond mother considers him, Percy is really a very good-looking young man. He is not tall; but his figure is powerful and well proportioned. His gray eyes, like the eyes of most artists, are observant and keen. They have a trick of concentration, which really is the endeavour to focus any object under notice, with a latent view to reproduction. This habit lends Percy an earnest and intent expression, which is only changed when he laughs; then he looks boyish and merry as his white teeth show under the slight *retroussé* moustache. The French blood that courses in his mother's veins runs gaily in his also, and inspires a certain debonair manner, which is considered fascinating, and proves irresistible to most women.

Percy has already made his mark as an artist; he loves his profession and the social triumphs it secures him. His temperament

is genial, and it is pleasant to find a cordial welcome wherever he goes. He is a general favourite in that exclusive coterie known as the Academy Club, whose members are professionally engaged in the pursuit of the Fine Arts. Most of them have already won laurels in their respective callings. To be popular among men like these gives Percy a certain distinction, which he thoroughly appreciates. He likes to stand well with his fellows, and to know that there is scarce a member of that club who would refuse to do him a service, or have other than good words to say of him.

But not only among his fellow-men is Percy a favourite. Ladies of the *beau monde*, artists' wives and sisters, as well as many others, old and young, are prodigal of invitations and favours for the captivating young painter. His studio bears witness to the generosity of his patronesses, who have

bestowed all manner of gifts upon him, from unique specimens of ancient china to elaborately-embroidered modern slippers, cigar-cases, and smoking-caps. The velvet painting-coat he wears while he is at his work has been carefully lined and quilted by the fair hands of a certain Lady Annette, who considers the patronage of rising genius her vocation in life.

The chairs and the sofa in his studio and "antechamber" are covered with his fond mother's needlework, and sorely has the good lady tried her failing sight to make her dear boy's home pretty with the delicate labour of her industrious fingers. So Percy may justly be described as one of Fortune's favourites. The Venetian mirror in his anteroom is ornamented (?) with notes and cards of invitation, in many colours, sizes, and shapes. The orthodox square pasteboard is there, which officially "*Requests*

the honour;" and the dainty crumpled rose-leaf note, which begs "My dear Mr. Hetheringham, for the pleasure," etc., "*early*, and *sans cérémonie*;" or to supper after the theatre, or to a smoking concert, or an impromptu dance in "our studio."

Percy devotes his mornings to his models and his work with creditable persistency; but with the waning light of the precious day he sets forth on pleasure and recreation bent.

A fashionable "At Home," with its concomitant tea, muffins, chat, and music, is hardly suggestive of keen enjoyment to a light-hearted young artist; and as a rule Percy avoids these drearily dull ceremonials. But Lady Annette St. Clair, who justly prides herself on receiving the *élite* of the artistic world in her *salon*, has made a point of Mr. Hetheringham's presence on this particular November afternoon. Lady

Annette is a charming woman, and she has a very decided will of her own, to which Percy, after a feeble resistance, is bound to yield as other men do. So he sets forth, obedient, though reluctant, and yawning at the anticipation of the boredom which awaits him.

But once in the presence of the gentle ladies, who greet him with pleasant smiles and words of welcome, he soon forgets his former misgivings, and responds to the attentions lavished upon him with that un-English vivacity for which he is so much admired. His attempts at conversation are suddenly checked, however, by an announcement which fills most of the men who hear it with dismay.

"I must request silence for my friend Miss Olympia Lee, who has kindly consented to recite 'Maud Muller' for us," says Lady Annette, in that clear staccato tone of hers,

which penetrates the thickest buzz of general conversation, as it does the tender murmur of whispered confidences.

"If she herself would recite, we should all be delighted to listen," says Percy *sotto voce,* to a man standing by his side; "but it is the greatest mistake to inflict promiscuous spouting upon thinking men."

"Yes, indeed," assents the other, who is an author with a preference for the reading of his own works. "Only last night I endured tortures at an evening party, where a Transatlantic female held forth in blank verse for three-quarters of an hour. If this is the same woman, I shall bolt."

"What was she like?" asks Percy, smiling.

"She was tall and stout," says Mr. Author; "she wore short locks, a man's coat, a *pince-nez,* and a moustache."

"Be comforted, my dear fellow; this is

certainly not one of the strong-minded crew," says Percy, as his eyes light on the lady their hostess is leading into the centre of the now silent circle of guests.

Olympia Lee is small, dark, delicate. She wears a close-fitting velvet gown, lace ruffles around her slender throat and wrists, lace lappets on her smooth black hair. Her demeanour is dignified, her delivery polished, and, as the audience notes with satisfaction, there is a blessed absence of twang in her speech.

Percy, who likes to be comfortable, leans leisurely back in a low armchair, watches the lady attentively, and listens with interest. The poem is new to him, and he finds it full of suggestion. He is just now much troubled for lack of suitable paintable subjects; he has been in anxious consultation with experienced friends, and he has been "reading up," with a view to deciding on his principal picture for next year's Academy. Hitherto

this promiscuous research has had no satisfactory result; but as Miss Lee presents the picture of "Maud Muller" to his mental vision, it takes a decided, a feasible shape. He repeats fragments of the lines to himself as they fall from the reader's lips in musical rhythm. "*Beneath the torn hat glowed the wealth of simple beauty and rustic health . . . A vague unrest . . . a nameless longing filled her breast . . . the meadow sweet with hay. . . .*"

"She would have rippling golden hair," thinks Percy; "the rake in her hand, and wonderful eyes—eyes that tell of that nameless longing *yes!*" He decides as he springs to his feet, "I have found my subject."

"Maud Muller" assumes the guise of inspiration to his suddenly excited brain. He has no time for formalities now; he makes his adieux hurriedly, to the manifest annoyance of Lady Annette; but his whispered praises

of her *protégée,* Miss Lee, compensate in some measure for his abrupt departure. It is a favourite scheme of hers that Olympia should find favour in the eyes of her "pet" artist. The instinct of match-making is strong within her. Most good women possess it, and they who have no children of their own are all the more inclined to look after those of other people.

Percy meanwhile is driving towards Chelsea, oblivious alike of the reader and his gracious hostess; thinking wholly, and with growing interest, of that newly-suggested subject.

This very morning he had placed a fresh canvas upon the easel, with the vague intention of commencing some new work; but inspiration was wanting, and no sketch had been begun. Now, while the impression upon his mind is perfectly clear, he will trace an outline in charcoal, and to-morrow morning

he will set to work upon the sketch of what he hopes will be a grand picture some day.

With a good model—ah, that will be the greatest difficulty—a model who will inspire him; and where is such a one to be found? He passes the commonplace professionals in rapid dissatisfied review; then he thinks of the ladies of his acquaintance. Is there one among them who would answer to the ideal "Maud Muller" already clearly defined to his mental vision? There is a certain Miss Bolingbroke—she has the right tone of complexion and hair; but she is *grande dame*—would expect adulation, and consider the fact of her sitting a frightful bore and marvellous condescension. No; no good result could accrue thus. Far better the simple professional, who gladly poses for her hardly-earned five shillings a day, than a fine lady who comes with airs and graces,

finds it impossible to retain the necessary position for ten consecutive minutes, and considers the vexed artist a perfect monster of cruelty if he presumes to expect unflagging attention. He must inquire — must look about for a model to suit him and his subject; then——

How bitterly cold is this piercing wind! how fast and thick the snowflakes are falling! The chill air actually penetrates the closed window of the hansom.

"Bah!" Percy springs to the ground, and stamps his feet. They are frozen. Russia, Siberia—can anything be colder than this? "Great heavens!" he exclaims, stopping short as he is about to place the latch-key in the lock of his studio-door, "what is this?" and he bends down, using his fingers where darkness has made sight useless. A woman is crouching on the doorstep — a woman asleep, faint, or—dead?

He lifts the stiff, frozen form in his arms. He will look at her by the blazing gas, which he lights as soon as he has laid her on the sofa in the studio.

Shall he leave her and run for a doctor? If she be dead, no doctor can help her, poor soul; and if she is only faint with cold, he can surely revive her. The stove is still alight, the room is warm; she is sure to recover her senses there. And as his worst fears leave him, he laughs at himself for his foolish anxieties. Ten to one she is an impostor, who has heard of his good-nature and presumed upon it. If that be so, he can give her a shilling, and send her away with a curse. She will deserve the curse rather than the shilling, for she has given him quite a turn.

He has laid her down now, and with hasty, trembling hands he strikes a match, turns the gas on full, and, as its light falls

upon her face, he looks upon it with amazed eyes.

She still lies white, unconscious, rigid; but she is beautiful.

No low ragged impostor this, but a lovely young girl. The artist and the man within him are both touched with infinite admiration, with sudden intense compassion. The perfect oval of her delicate face, the long dark lashes resting upon her cheeks, the waving masses of gold-brown hair. Oh, why are her eyes closed? When will she open them and look at him?

The great desire that she should do so recalls him to her necessities. He fills a glass with brandy. "That's better than medicine, as Uncle Gustave says," he mutters, and strives to pour some of the spirit between her pallid lips; but they are firmly closed, and the drops trickle down. He is enraged at this; it seems as though he were taking some

advantage of her sweet unconsciousness. Ah, she is reviving! She utters a feeble sigh; the fingers he is chafing move in his close grasp; her lips tremble, and she opens her eyes.

"Thank God!" cries Percy, with a fervour which astonishes himself. And as she turns her startled eyes shyly upon him: "This is my 'Maud Muller,'" he thinks.

The spirit of inspiration is strong upon him; he is so filled with the thought of his contemplated picture that he almost loses sight of the necessities of this poor, faint, frozen creature, who seems as if she had fallen upon his doorstep out of the snow-clouds above, in answer to his earnest desire for a model. She has raised herself now, and when he gives her some brandy-and-water and bids her drink, she does so obediently.

"You are hungry," he asserts.

She makes no attempt at denial.

He brings her some soup from his pantry, and quickly warms it over the stove.

She watches him in listless silence; she is slowly recovering; but she is not quite herself yet. She neither wonders where she is, nor how she came there; nor does the presence of this stranger distress her. She accepts what he gives her; she feels warm, comfortable, and at rest. Her reasoning faculties are not aroused yet; she has vague sensations only; but such as they are, they are soothing and pleasant.

"You are very kind and very considerate," she says at last. It is the first time she has spoken. He has discreetly abstained from addressing her, anxious to give her ample time to recover herself. He turns towards her now. She has left the sofa, and is standing irresolute. She

feels dazed still, the floor seems to move under her feet, and she covers her face with her hands to shut out the bewildering glare of light.

"I will turn the gas lower," he says, and suits the action to the words. "You are not quite strong yet, and the light is too much for you. Will you come and sit here by the fire?" he resumes presently. "That part of the room is always colder than this."

She crosses over and takes the chair he offers, which is near his own. He has opened the doors of the stove, and they both look into the clear red coke fire.

She is still too languid, and he is far too much interested to notice how long they keep silence; but suddenly Clare rouses herself with an effort, and says, in a faltering tone:

"I owe you some account of myself,

and what has brought me into this miserable plight. I will tell you some of the troubles I have had, and I think I can convince you that I am neither unworthy nor ungrateful."

He notices the painful hesitation of her utterance, though he is charmed to find that her speech and her accent are those of a lady.

"Pray don't try to talk if it tires you," he says gently. "I can wait until you feel stronger."

"But I must give you some account of myself, and at once," she says, determined to conquer a reluctance to speak, which she feels to be cowardly since he is so gentle, considerate, and kind. And then she continues without further hesitation. "I must ask you to give me some advice, and perhaps even some help for this one night."

"Believe that I am entirely at your

service," he answers gallantly. Indeed, he feels tempted to kneel at her feet, and swear to be her faithful servant, humble, loyal, and true. But fortunately for both of them he conquers this wildly-chivalrous impulse, and contents himself by listening to all she tells him in silence, if not in patience. She states her facts briefly and clearly. She tells him that she is alone in London; that she ran away from a situation on account of the injustice shown her by the lady of the house; and that this very day she has had to leave a temporary lodging in consequence of something which was very painful to her, and of which she begs he will excuse her speaking at greater length just now.

"Some ruffian has been persecuting this poor child," thinks Percy, who immediately puts his own interpretation on this brief outline of her story.

"I left my travelling-bag, my books, my work, all I had in the world, behind me," she says; "and at this moment I have not a penny in my pocket, nor do I know where to go for a night's shelter. I can work, and I have proved that I can earn my living if only the opportunity be given to me. You are a gentleman, and you have been good and kind to me. Will you trust me, and help me yet a little further? Words are empty idle things, I know; but indeed, sir, I can and will prove by my actions that what I have told you is all quite true, and that I have now no greater desire than to gain an honest livelihood, and to convince you that I am deserving of your help if you will give it me."

Percy's experience of London life and London impostors has been large and varied; he might indeed, like Mrs. Foley, have declared it as very *expensive.* He has been

lied to and cheated by women, models, and others, and he has learned to be doubtful of all professions, and habitually on his guard against strangers.

And yet he believes in this forlorn beautiful girl, who has neither money, friends, nor a home to shelter her, and whom he has found fainting upon his door-step. She is a lady in the true sense of the word; on that point he has no doubt. He honestly desires to help her. To put her more at her ease, he will at once let her know that, in the time to come, she will have it in her power to do him a great service, if she so chooses. At this suggestion of his she brightens visibly.

"And now I hope you will not object to my finding you a comfortable lodging for the night," he says. "To-morrow we will talk over the future together, and then I will ask you to do me a favour, and will

also propose a way of earning money to you, which I think you will find acceptable. And now will you tell me your name?"

But he repents the question as soon as he has asked it; for he sees the look of pain and perplexity which comes into her face.

"May I call you Maud?" he cries eagerly. "I have a reason for asking you, as I can never think of you by any other name."

"Yes; Maud Smith, if you please," she answers, with a smile that he thinks bewitching; and then, afraid that she may see the admiration she inspires in his ardent eyes, he turns hastily away, takes up his hat, and asks her if she is ready to go with him and find a lodging.

"Let me wrap this plaid around you," he says, seizing a light travelling-rug and folding it about her shoulders. "It is still bitterly cold."

He has to battle with a rising tempta-

tion to clasp her in his arms, as he wraps the shawl about her supple figure; but the facts of her innocence, of her being his guest, and, to some extent, in his power, restrain him, and give him strength and courage to resist. He is no coward; and to take advantage of a woman's helplessness in any sense, is cowardly. Therefore he endeavours to steel his heart against her fascinating influence, and they walk briskly forth together over the crisp white snow. It is freezing still, but Clare no longer feels the cold. Her heart is comforted, her starving body has been warmed and fed, and her troubled spirit is at rest; for she feels she has found a stanch friend in this stranger, although she has just heard his name for the first time. Her great comfort lies in the fact of his assurance that she, in her turn, will be able to do him some service, and that he will find her some work.

They enter a small house presently, the landlady of which opens the door in person. She is a tidy elderly woman, and receives Mr. Hetheringham with some surprise, but with evident pleasure.

"I want you to find a bedroom for this young lady, who is a friend of ours," says Percy, leading the way into the neat little parlour, the door of which he holds ceremoniously open for "Miss Smith," whom he now introduces to "Mrs. Andrew" by that name.

"And the young lady's luggage, sir?" asks Mrs. Andrew.

"Ay, there's the rub," says Percy, with a fine tragedy manner. "The fact is, Miss Smith has only just arrived in town, and her luggage was either not put into the train, or taken out at Clapham Junction; at all events, it did not come with her. So we shall have to make a considerable call

on the resources of your establishment, Mrs. Andrew; but as you are a wonderful woman, wonders may fairly be expected of you, and I shall rely upon your giving Miss Smith every possible assistance." He has dropped the bantering tone, and speaks with considerable gravity.

"You may rely on my doing the best I can, sir, for any friend of yours," says Mrs. Andrew readily; "but I fear my poor place is hardly fit for a lady."

"Indeed, I shall be most grateful if you can only manage to give me a bed," says Clare, stepping forward, and meeting the old lady's blinking eyes with a bright smile in her own. "The prospect of rest and quiet is delightful to me, I assure you; for I am a stranger in London, and travellers without luggage are mostly unwelcome lodgers."

"I'm sure, ma'am, I'm very sorry for

your loss," says Mrs. Andrew kindly; "and now, if you please, I'll show you to your room, and I'll just set a light to the fire there. We shall manage till morning, never fear."

"Good-night, and many thanks," says Clare, holding her hand out to Percy.

As he takes it, he deftly slips two sovereigns into her soft palm.

"I shall come round early in the morning to see how you are getting on," he says hurriedly; and before she has had time to reply or remonstrate, he has gone.

Clare does not forget to kneel by the side of her bed to-night, and, with a heart overflowing with gratitude, she commits herself to the care of Him who tempereth the wind to the shorn lamb, and has guided her footsteps so far in safety and peace.

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE STUDIO.

I ask no more from mortals
  Than your beautiful face implies;
That beauty the artist, beholding,
  Interprets and sanctifies.

MRS. ANDREW, in whose modest home Clare had found so welcome and convenient a shelter, had been Monsieur Bacchelier's housekeeper during Percy's childhood, when the merry schoolboy spent many happy holidays in the family mansion on Brixton Rise. Mrs. Andrew reigned supreme over the

domestic part of that old-fashioned establishment, and her admiration for "Master Percy" dated back close on twenty years now. The old lady, in her long career of confidential servant to the crotchety bachelor (Percy's uncle), had acquired two virtues —rare among her sex and class—she was silent and discreet.

That there was some mystery about this remarkably handsome young lady who came to her house on foot with the gay young artist, who had no luggage and yet was introduced as a friend of "ours," Mrs. Andrew felt assured; but her experience had taught her that it answered "best in the end" to accept facts as they were stated to her, and not to allow herself the privilege of question or comment so dear to the feminine mind.

This passive acquiescence had always saved much trouble and discussion to others and herself. Time would surely throw some light

on what was now an enigma; time had solved all other mysteries for her in due course, and her patient silence had eventually been rewarded by enlightenment. She had left the impatience of youth behind her long ago, and could afford to wait.

There was some mystery about Miss Smith's advent in London, but there could be no possible doubt about the young lady herself. On that point Mrs. Andrew was thoroughly satisfied when she had had an interview with her lodger the morning after her arrival. Mrs. Andrew kept no servant; she waited upon her lodgers—of whom she could accommodate three — herself. Before Miss Smith could accomplish her toilet, it was necessary that certain purchases should be made for her. Mrs. Andrew volunteered to go out herself, and received ten shillings to spend, and ten more in prepayment of a week's rent of the little bedroom in which

Clare had spent the night most comfortably. This ready-money transaction satisfied the old lady as to her lodger's solvency—a very important item in that creed of respectability, which she held with all the tenacity of a frugal-minded woman who has put by a "pretty penny" in her time.

Clare, thankful to have found so convenient and economical a lodging, and so obliging a landlady, was most anxious to secure this little room for herself; but she was equally determined not to be received under false colours.

"I am very poor, I must tell you, Mrs. Andrew," she avowed, without any hesitation; "and there is little chance of my ever regaining the luggage I have left behind; but work has been promised me, and I can work well. To prove this to you, I shall begin this morning to make some new covers for the toilet-table and the armchair in my

bedroom. When they are finished I will present them to you."

The materials Clare required were purchased for her by Mrs. Andrew; and that good old soul, whose little house was the joy and pride of her life, was delighted to see Miss Smith settle to her self-imposed task with the skill of a rapid and experienced worker.

At eleven o'clock Mr. Hetheringham called, and Miss Smith was asked to step down to the parlour, the tenant of which (a City man) was absent as usual.

"Will you come round to my studio with me?" asks Percy, noting with exceeding satisfaction the lovely flush of restored health on his new acquaintance's blooming face. The remembrance of last night's cold pallor and deathlike rigidity vanishes like the thought of a horrid nightmare in the presence of this fresh radiant beauty. "We can talk at our leisure there."

"And have you really thought of something I can do for you?" says Clare, as she enters the studio.

What a wonderful place it is! Last night it appeared vast, gloomy, and uncanny, by reason of its enormous size and the partial light thrown by the stove and gas-lamps, which left the peaked oak roof with its cross beams and all the distant corners in mysterious darkness. But this morning the light, shining through a north window which occupies half the farther wall, lets sunshine into every nook; and Clare wonders and admires.

There was an artist in Torchester, a friend of her dear old master's, who gave drawing-lessons at the college, and who, for that kind master's sake, taught his little *protégée* to handle a pencil and dabble in water-colours in futile childish fashion. That "artist" called his little back-parlour a

studio; and Clare's visits there afforded her the only glimpse she ever had into the vast art-world, the disciples of which are as numerous and varied as their habitations.

The lingering smell of tobacco-smoke; the easel, palette, and mahl-stick; the canvases; the tables littered with scraps and sketches—all these were familiar to Clare; but the luxury of this vast atelier, with its Persian rugs, stamped-leather chairs, and velvet sofa, was as different from the cramped poverty of poor little Mr. Bishop's study in Torchester, as was that humble artist himself in his threadbare jacket, smoking a short clay pipe, from the polished gentleman who now appears before her in his picturesque velvet coat, wearing embroidered slippers, and holding a meerschaum pipe in his hand, the bowl of which is fashioned in the likeness of a mermaid, with clear-cut profile and flowing hair.

"Do you mind my lighting my pipe, Miss Maud?" asks Percy; and adds pleadingly, "Pray permit me to smoke; for I want you to give me the pleasure of your company for an hour or two this morning; and, if you don't object, I thought I might go on with my work at the easel, while you sit in this chair by the fire. But if I must not smoke, I fear my pretty plans will fall to the ground; for I should come to a standstill without my pipe. The influence of tobacco soothes, while it inspires; and we men are such slaves to our —vices."

"Don't use such a hard word, Mr. Hetheringham," says Clare, laughing. "For my part, I don't consider smoking a bad habit even; for my poor father, who is dead, smoked every evening, and taught me to fill and light his pipe for him. He said he could always blow the day's clouds away

in his tobacco-smoke; so I got to like the smell of it."

"Wise man," says Percy, with a sigh of relief, and lights up on the instant.

He evidently expects his visitor to settle down in pleasant companionship with him; and the prospect of remaining in this delightfully suggestive work-room is very tempting to Clare, who has the instincts of an artist, and whose natural inclination certainly is towards Bohemianism.

"May I sit by the fire and work, while you are painting?" she says, falling into his easy colloquial mood without the slightest affectation, and with a perfect absence of that *mauvaise honte* which painfully characterises underbred "misses."

"Nothing could be more delightful!" he says gaily. "I have no model coming to-day; so my work to some extent is mechanical, and therefore uninteresting. If

you can make yourself comfortable here, and will talk to me a little, you will do me a signal favour, and considerably lighten the burden of the day's labour."

What woman worthy the name could resist so deftly-framed an appeal to her kindness?

Certainly not Clare. There is a subtle flattery in the fact of a man's humbly asking for the aid and comfort of companionship, which appeals irresistibly to the female heart. So Clare, delighted at the notion that her presence may assist the artist in his labours, settles comfortably by his fireside, occupying her hands with her newly-commenced work, and quite ready to talk or listen, as the busy man may deem desirable.

He talks with animation, amusing her and himself by the recital of the vicissitudes of his artistic career. He tells her how

many times he has been "hung" at the Academy, and explains the *modus operandi* of that illustrious institution. He ridicules some of the "old fogeys," speaks in terms of praise of others, and has plenty to say of the rising artists of the day; but though he talks so glibly, he is not idle; indeed, he handles his pencil with surprising diligence. He is making a sketch preparatory to putting it on the wood; it is the first outline on paper of a full-page illustration for *The Easel*, a magazine to which Hetheringham is a regular contributor.

Clare, from her coign of vantage near the stove, glances across now and then, and eagerly notes the progress he is making. But she is too far away to distinguish the subject clearly; and by-and-by her interest so completely masters her shyness that she leaves her chair, goes over to the artist's side, and takes up her position there.

He appears not to notice her vicinity; but, in truth, it delights him, and, as she watches, he explains what he is doing.

"It is so wonderful and so interesting," she says, "to see the point of your pencil and those single lines creating all that form, and telling quite a pathetic story."

"Ah now, I have come to a standstill," he says, as he pauses to cut the pencil, which has broken over a heavy line.

"Do let me cut it for you," says Clare; "I can manage that." She takes up his penknife and points half a dozen well-worn pencils lying on a table at his side.

"You are as considerate as you are clever," he says, when he sees what she has accomplished; "but now I have come to a worse difficulty than a broken pencil, and I hardly dare ask you to help me this time."

"Oh, if there is anything I can do,

please tell me," she exclaims eagerly. "I am so glad to be useful, and—I have been trying to make myself so all my life; that is my vocation, you know."

How charming she is! How prettily she speaks! How well she chooses her words! He must steel his heart, which is beating with undue emotion again; and he certainly must forbear to meet those earnest beautiful eyes of hers, which have haunted him ever since he looked into them last night.

If he can contrive to concentrate his attention on his work, he will conquer this mad desire to tell her that he thinks her the most fascinating of women; if not—ah, he would indeed be a fool to run the risk of offending her now—her, whom fortune sent in answer to his fervent prayers—this ideal "Maud Muller."

"My difficulty just now," he resumes in a very matter-of-fact tone, "is the necessity of

bit of nature here. To get the folds of this woman's dress, who is kneeling in the foreground of my sketch, I must see them. There are effects which one's unaided imagination cannot supply; among these, drapery is the most harassing. Would you—could you help me by kneeling on that cushion for a few minutes, and lifting your arms and hands—thus? She is entreating for pardon. I don't know the story; but that is the situation. A 'forbidding-looking man' is to lean against this tree to the right: those are my instructions. Will you pose for me?"

"I can certainly try," says Clare laughingly; and in a moment she has assumed the attitude he suggests. Her dress falls in picturesque folds about her; her hands and her face are lifted in entreaty. She poses gracefully and steadily.

"Thank you ten thousand times," says Percy, rising and coming to her assistance as

she tries to get up; but her limbs are cramped and aching.

"You posed so admirably," says he, with contrition, "that I have quite forgotten the length of time I have kept you in one position; and now I have tired you. What a brute I am!"

"Nonsense," she says, laughing; "you are far too apt to overrate your shortcomings. This stiffness will be over as soon as I have walked about a bit; and if I really have been of some little use to you, I shall be delighted."

"You have posed so exceedingly well," says he, "that I shall at once summon up courage to make that suggestion you asked me about."

"You will tell me how I can serve you, and—also—how I can earn some money?" she asks, her face flushing, her eyes shining.

Percy turns away from her, and begins to pace the room with agitated steps.

"Think of your picture," he says to himself, "and forget this bewitchingly lovely and lovable woman."

"Did you ever meet with a poem called 'Maud Muller?'" he asks, but takes care not to look at her while he speaks.

She has read the poem. It was in a collection of American authors which a dear old friend once lent her.

He asks no question—he has resolutely determined not to do so; but he feels an odd relief as she says an *old* friend.

Friend alone, unqualified, would have suggested a lover, perhaps the man who gave her that objectionable ring, with its obtrusive "For ever," the only article of jewellery she wears, and on the finger girls are wont to reserve for the wedding-ring. He continues to pace to and fro, but he is quieter now. Her presence, and the steady stitch-stitch of her needle, have a tranquillising effect upon him. He

tells her that he heard the poem read yesterday, and that he thinks her a suitable model for his picture—his principal picture—for the Academy next year.

"If you can make up your mind to pose for me regularly, I can give you half-a-guinea a-dáy," he says, striving to be as business-like as though he were speaking to the most ordinary of his models. "It is by no means easy work, remember," he adds deprecatingly. "However much I may try to spare you, even if I make you rest between whiles, your limbs will ache, you will feel cramped and weary, and, perhaps, hate me for ever having suggested what, to amateurs, seems torture, and to the most hardened professional must always be more or less trying and difficult."

"If one's heart is in one's work, nothing can seem very hard," she says earnestly; "and I cannot imagine an easier or a pleasanter way of earning so much money."

He has paused in his hurried walk, and is standing in front of her now. She rises and holds her hand out to him.

"I cannot thank you in words for all you are doing for me," she says, her beautiful eyes filling with sudden irrepressible tears; "but I think I can prove my gratitude and my desire to serve you by the unflagging attention I will give you as your much-honoured model."

He has taken her hand eagerly as she offered it, and holds it closely with a lingering pressure. He seems disinclined to relinquish his hold too, which makes it irksome to her; then she withdraws it.

"I have not been quite idle, you see," she says, trying to ignore the embarrassment they both feel, as she shows him a strip of holland on which a chain of daisies is beginning to bloom in wool of natural colours. Her woman's wit has warned her of danger,

and she is quick to avert it by this laughing allusion to her flower-patterned broidery. She blames herself for having been too demonstrative in the exhibition of her sudden but heartfelt gratitude; and she wisely determines not to be led away by her emotions again. That lingering pressure of his fingers on hers has taught her a wholesome and a necessary lesson.

His quick sensitive nature divines her thoughts, and he bitterly reproaches himself for the trouble he has caused her. If he allows his feelings to betray themselves thus, she will decline to sit to him at all. And what would become of "Maud Muller" then?

"May I take it for granted that you will come to me here every morning?" he says after a long and somewhat awkward pause, in which they have both resolved on their future course. He assumes that highly

matter-of-fact air again, and she, much relieved, responds in a businesslike tone.

"Name your own time," she says, "and I will be punctual. I should prefer to begin my sittings soon; for I cannot feel like a free agent until I have repaid you the money you kindly lent me last night."

"Proud as Lucifer. Shall I succeed in taming her?" he thinks, puzzled. He has known many women in his time, but never one quite like this. Where did she spring from? What can her history be? She is a lady; she has been well educated; she has read; and she has thought for herself too. How is it he found her in such a deplorable plight? Who and where are her friends? She surely cannot stand alone in the world?

Well, perhaps it is no business of his, but it is really perplexing. Will the time come when she will trust and confide in him?

It seems as though she guesses his thoughts; for she says:

"I hardly know what or how much of my trouble I told you last night, Mr. Hetheringham; but this morning I have the courage to ask you a favour. *Trust* me; my life has been an unhappy but a very simple one. There is no mystery, and little enough romance, in it; but circumstances have rendered it absolutely necessary that I should remain in hiding for some time to come. I have done nothing that I am ashamed of" (how proud and defiant she looks as she makes this declaration!); "it is from others I am flying, not from the consequences of my own acts; those I shall always have the courage to meet face to face, I hope. Will you, can you, believe this?"

Her inclination, as she uttered the last words, was to appeal to him; but she remembers the failure of a previous demon-

stration on her part, checks herself, and asks her final question coldly, quietly—more like a disinterested lawyer than an impassioned woman.

Percy takes his cue from her. He meets her honest eyes with that unfaltering gaze of his that has such a power of concentration in it.

"No one could look at you and doubt your truth," he says, with conviction. And all the time he is thinking: "How shall I ever do justice to her glorious colour? How can I render that wonderful complexion? What brush could interpret the varying brilliancy of her beautiful eyes?"

Fortunately for him, his thoughts have wandered from the sentimental to the practical aspect of admiration.

With the desire to paint her beauty as it appears to him, the difficulties likely to occur in the task present themselves, and

he has almost forgotten her question, and his answer when she speaks again.

"That is well," she says. "I will attempt no further protestation. Time must prove my friend in this instance, and time will show you that you were right to believe in and trust me as you do. You think I ought to be quite satisfied now?" she adds after a little thought; "but I have still a favour to ask you; it is the favour of absolute silence where I am concerned."

His eyes demand an explanation.

"I want you, I must ask you," she says, "to give me your word of honour that you will not tell anyone about me, about your new model. And you must not let anyone see the picture you are painting, if it really is to be like me, that is."

"But it is to be my great picture; it is going into the Academy!" he cries, in evident dismay.

"Ah, but that will not be until next year," she says; "and by that time I can —I shall—oh, everyone will have forgotten me, no doubt." She stammers, and is more confused than he has seen her as yet. Many thoughts have flitted through her brain. Before next May, Lord Verstrume will surely have ceased to trouble himself about her at all; and if Harold should have returned, who knows but that very picture may give him some clue to her whereabouts, and, if he wishes, he can find her then.

"I certainly do not intend to interfere with any plans you have made for yourself and the future, Mr. Hetheringham," she says. "All I would venture to ask of you is silence and secrecy for the present."

"I will swear to be discretion personified," he declares; and she, looking anxiously into his face, sees he is serious.

"That being settled, I think I will go

home," she says; "for I am hungry, and Mrs. Andrew told me her dinner would always be ready at two o'clock."

"Won't you stay and have some luncheon with me?" he asks. "My good mother, who is a Frenchwoman, always keeps my larder well supplied with *bouillon* and *pâtés* and things. I think you enjoyed the soup last night?"

"I did, indeed," she says, smiling; "but I would prefer to go home now. As I shall hope to remain with Mrs. Andrew for some time, I must try and replace some of the necessaries I have lost."

"You will want money," he says, taking some gold out of his purse and offering it to her.

"When I have paid my debt to you, and earned more, I shall be glad to take it," she says. "For the present I have all I want. At what time shall I come in the morning?"

"Will ten o'clock be too early for you?" he asks, much troubled to find he is to lose her now, and yet not daring to tell her how much he wishes her to remain.

She has put on the little serge hat that matches her dress. "Good-morning," she says; "I will be quite punctual to-morrow." She does not offer him her hand; but is gone, and walking briskly away along the narrow passage that leads past Mrs. Spruce's shop and into the road, before he quite realises that she has left him, and that a terrible blank has fallen upon his prospects for the day.

If she had remained, he could have gone on with that troublesome sketch of his, and then he would have put it on the block to-morrow, as the folks at *The Easel* expect him to do; but—she has gone! The salt has lost its savour, the notion of work has become distasteful. He longs for to-morrow;

then she will be here again, a fresh canvas set up, inspiration cannot be wanting, and the new work will be begun with wondrous vigour and zeal.

Oh for to-morrow!

Meanwhile the air of the studio seems oppressive; to stay there would be impossible now. He will go out to luncheon.

Lady Annette is always glad to see him. And so she proves herself now, when he is unexpectedly announced.

"You are doubly welcome to-day, you traitor," she says, with a threatening movement of her slim white hand, "because Olly Lee is spending the day with me, and I particularly wish you to know and admire my *protégée* as much as I do. If you make yourself very amiable, we may even forgive you for running away in that rude fashion yesterday."

"I must offer you my fervent congratu-

lations, my humble and hearty thanks, Miss Lee, for your exquisite rendering of a most suggestive poem," says Percy, in his best manner, when Olly enters the room. Her velvet gown is exchanged for a simple cashmere robe, in which she looks more diminutive than ever.

"I guess you were inspired to run away pretty quick all the same," she says, laughing, and arching her black brows ominously.

"I was indeed inspired," he says very gravely. "And the time may come when you will acknowledge the fact."

"Oh my! ain't he serious!" she exclaims.

Her everyday speech is decidedly more *prononcé* than her reading; but she is so quaint, so childlike and *petite* in every sense, that Percy, with all his fastidiousness, does not object to her Americanism. On the contrary, the novelty of it seems piquant to him.

"After luncheon, I shall entreat you to

talk to me about 'Maud Muller,'" he says; "to tell me all the poem suggests to you, who have thought much about it; to repeat some of the most telling lines, and to give me your opinion of what the heroine with the rake should be like, suppose one meant to paint her picture. Will you forgive me, a stranger, for desiring to trespass thus on your good-nature?"

Miss Lee glances at Lady Annette.

"Lady Annette will give us leave to chat awhile, I am sure," says Percy, with his pleasant boyish smile; "indeed I have little doubt we shall have her kind assistance at our artistic confab."

"That you shall," says her ladyship cordially; "for I can see that you mean to do something this time, Master Percy. You have been lazy too long. If you have been inspired at last, it will be a godsend to many of us."

Other visitors are announced at this moment, and Lady Annette has only time to whisper these oracular words to Percy as he is about to follow Miss Lee into the library, while their hostess goes to meet her other guests in the drawing-room :

"Courage, *mon ami!* Faint heart never won lady fair or dark."

* * * * *

Long after the artist and all the other visitors have taken their leave, the luncheon, the poem, and its subsequent discussion being well-nigh forgotten, Lady Annette takes Olly's small face in her hands, imprints a kiss upon the delicate lips, and says :

"You have inspired a painter, my child, and you have made a conquest."

"He is most charming, I will declare," says Olly, "and when he and I had that good time in the library, talking of all things

round, I guess I liked him very well indeed; but up to this present I take it he is thinking far more of the great picture he means to paint than of any living woman."

CHAPTER VII.

THE MODEL.

I hear thy voice, I see thy smile,
I look upon thy folded hair;
Ah, while I dream not they beguile,
My heart is in the snare.

As the neighbouring church-clocks strike ten, the new model knocks at the door at No. 1 Baskerville Studios.

Percy has been waiting for her in a fever of impatience. He stayed at the club very late last night, playing billiards, smoking, talking, eager to kill time, anxious to get

through the tedious hours, thankful when night had come; but by no means delighted when night brought no rest to his excited brain. Each passing hour was tolled into his wideawake senses with maddening iteration. The temporary oblivion he prayed and longed for was denied him. He tried to read, but her voice filled his thoughts. It occurred to him to put on his clothes and walk round to the street in which she lodged. Perhaps a sight of the modest little house that held her might calm him. What fiend possessed him? Or was it Cupid, the "innocent traitor," who held him in such tyrannical bondage?

Percy had never learnt the true meaning of that much-abused verb "to love." He had conjugated it in many fantastic ways, he had trifled with it, and he had laughed heartily at those who avowed themselves victims to *la grande passion.* He had played with fire

all his life; but hitherto he had always escaped without burning his fingers.

Now they have certainly been scorched, and he rebels furiously against the inconvenience he is suffering. To endure with patient submission is not given to many men; they are apt to cry out at the first warning of pain, and invariably revile Fate for so afflicting them.

Percy tosses and frets miserably until dawn; then, just as he resolves to try the experiment of a walk, sleep overcomes him, and wraps him in restful unconsciousness until nine o'clock. He wakes with a start, and joyfully remembers that in another hour "Maud" will be there to inspire him.

She has evidently resolved to ignore any of the confidences which passed between them yesterday. She does not allude to his promise, to her gratitude, or the interest she takes in his work. She observes his

directions as to the pose he requires with wonderful accuracy. When he bids her bare her throat and arms, she obeys without a moment's hesitation. She has determined to ignore herself while she is acting as his model. Her services are well paid for; she will give them thoroughly. As far as in her power lies, she will conscientiously fulfil the duties of a professional model, and simply act as a lay-figure. That is her reading of the agreement she has entered into with this artistic paymaster, and to abide by it must henceforth be her duty. Clare is never at a loss how to act, once the lines of duty are clearly defined for her. It is her nature to acquiesce rather than rebel, and she loves to do so conscientiously.

Her cool self-possession, her unhesitating obedience, amaze Percy. He was prepared to make all sorts of apologies, to argue, and, if need were, to entreat. But all his

intentions are changed by her steadfastness, which has a salutary effect upon him, for it subdues his excitement. Seeing her so determined to fulfil her part of their contract, he soon endeavours to follow her good example, and commences his sketch in sober earnest.

She certainly poses admirably, and the great difference between her and the ordinary model is her superior intelligence. She has the feeling for what he requires; others can give him nothing but the position. Presently he becomes so engrossed by the progress of his work, that he almost forgets his model in watching the happy result of her graceful pose.

That first morning's sitting is repeated with very little variation on many succeeding days. Clare, having once realised the danger of working on Percy's emotional temperament, is careful to avoid this risk in future. Her

woman's wit aids her. She soon finds that, by adhering strictly to her professional duties, she forces him to work diligently, and she is secretly delighted by his rapid progress.

For her own part she has begun to sketch again, and once or twice has submitted her attempts to his criticism. He has made suggestions, which she has gladly adopted. He has acknowledged her natural talent, and encouraged her to persevere. He has bought flowers for her at Mrs. Spruce's, and when she has tried to paint them, he has generously given her the benefit of his experience and advice. Later on he has asked her for the gift of an Iris signed "Maud Muller," which he has hung among the art-treasures in his anteroom.

They work together in perfect content, and, thanks to Clare's unceasing vigilance, they remain friends—good friends only.

Percy knows he is held in check, but he

cannot resent the light curb her maidenly reserve puts upon him. Indeed, there is a piquancy in this novel restraint which he enjoys; for it has never entered into his relations with any of the fair sex before. While he is painting and Clare is posing, they have much talk together. Clare tells him some of her past experiences; she speaks of her life and her studies at Torchester, of the college, the masters and the students there; but she mentions no names; nor has Percy, after three months of daily intercourse, obtained the slightest clue to the donor of that massive ring, the obtrusive "For ever" on which is a perpetual eyesore to him.

The fact is that Clare's dignified reserve has so far awed him that he dares not ask her any direct questions on subjects which she tacitly avoids.

He talks to her of his extensive travels.

She listens with intense interest, and proves, by the pertinent questions she asks on these subjects, how much they attract her. He tells her of the world-famed pictures which he has seen in Paris, Rome, and Madrid. He tells her of the snow-clad Alps, and of the sunbaked desert; he has many amusing experiences to relate of his adventures among the primitive peasantry of the Tyrol, as well as of what has befallen him in the gay *salons* of the Austrian nobility.

Many visitors knock at the studio-door in the course of these months, but none are allowed to enter. "I have a model sitting," is always sufficient excuse for the non-admission of friends or strangers.

But even the conviction that no one will be permitted to enter on any pretext whatever, substantiated as it has been by the experience of months, cannot satisfy Clare that she is safe from intrusion. Whenever

there is a knock at the door she is startled, she flushes uneasily, and her heart beats with apprehension.

One bright clear February morning, the first really fine day in the new year, Clare, who has been standing for two hours, is alarmed by an unusually violent rat-tat at the studio-door.

"That's a flunky, bless him!" says Percy, considerately transposing his half-uttered anathema to a more suitable key. "Only an inflated jackanapes of a footman would attempt to hammer my door down. Don't look so terrified, Miss Maud; you know I shall let no one in. Besides, you have only to hide yourself behind the screen: that's not transparent. Now to answer this lordly summons."

He leaves the painting-room, palette and brushes in hand; and Clare shrinks behind the screen, as she always does until she is reassured by the closing of the outer door.

She is thinking of Lord Verstrume and his insolent footman at this moment. She has often remembered his lordship's frequent allusions to art and artists, of whom he considers himself a patron; and though she has been afraid even to mention the hateful name to Percy, she is haunted by the idea that his lordship is a friend of the artist's, and a regular visitor at Baskerville Studios.

In case anyone should enter she creeps away to her usual hiding-place behind the screen, which cuts off the farthest corner of the room, and stands there listening, expectant. As yet she has never required a hiding-place; but to-day——

"Not let me in? nonsense!" says a clear soprano voice, the staccato tones of which reach Clare distinctly as she stands anxiously waiting.

The owner of the voice, who is trailing heavy silks behind her, is crossing the ante-

room now, and has already entered the studio.

"The idea of refusing me half-an-hour's talk because you have a model coming! As if I were afraid of a model! I know the tribe well, my dear Percy—tall and short, thick and thin; patriarchs with flowing beards, doubled-up old crones, slim young women with fine eyes. Ah, such a one as this for instance!"

The trailing silks approach the easel. Clare hears every sound, and her heart beats loud and fast.

"Dear Lady Annette," says Percy, in a vexed tone, "I really wish you had not insisted on coming in this morning. No one has seen my principal picture this year, and I did not intend to let anyone know the subject even until it was on the walls of the Academy."

"Oh, this is delicious! positively de-

licious!" laughs Lady Annette. "I did not dream of anything so romantic when I came to Johnson's assistance. I had told him plainly that I would take no denial, and that if you were in the studio I should insist upon seeing you; and yet you actually——"

"Begged him to go back to your carriage and tell her ladyship, with Mr. Hetheringham's compliments, that he was too much engaged to receive any visitors; and, indeed, that was the truth."

Clare, trembling in her hiding-place, is quite aware that Percy is making this explanation for her benefit. He wishes her to know that the unwonted intrusion is not of his seeking. All she can do, under the circumstances, is to bide her time quietly. This very determined visitor will surely take her leave again in the course of an hour or so.

"Yes," resumes the lady, in a reproachful

tone, "the idea of your attempting to send me off when I generously forgave your unpardonable absence from all my receptions, and came at this unconscionable hour on purpose to find you at work and—alone."

"I know I have been very remiss in all my social duties of late, dear Lady Annette," says Percy; and his tone sounds constrained and apologetic. "The fact is I have stuck closer to my work this winter than I ever did before, and with——"

"And with such a model as that to bear you company," the lady interrupts him, pointing to the picture on the easel, "your wonderful devotion to your art is not quite so amazing to me as it appears to many of our mutual friends. Oh! Mr. Percy, what would our dear mamma say if she saw this picture, for the sake of which her son is neglecting all his oldest and best friends?"

Percy winces under this badinage. Never

before has Lady Annette appeared so unpleasantly frivolous to him.

"I hope and believe my dear mother would be glad to find that I have at last settled down to good steady work, which will show the world that I can do something, although I have so long been disgracefully idle."

"Oh, listen to this prodigal son!" exclaims Lady Annette, with a peal of laughter. "Why, Percy, dear boy, this is reformation with a vengeance indeed; but I think I can guess the secret of it, for I recognise the subject of that picture."

Clare's heart beats audibly. Percy feels agitated, and his looks betray him. Is Lady Annette going to reveal the secret which his model has so resolutely kept from him? Is he to hear Maud's history for the first time now?

If that be so, Fate is certainly playing them both an odd trick.

"Ah, you may well look confused, Master Percy!" the lady continues, still laughing. "Why did you not confide in me sooner? Now I must take the initiative, and, to be candid, I came here to-day principally to talk about her."

"Her?" asks Percy, pointing to the picture, and wondering what Maud thinks of the coming revelation.

"I had not the chance of telling you anything about her that day you came to luncheon—was it a year ago? it seems like it. We were not alone together for five minutes, if you remember. Well, she comes of a good old Southern family. Her people own a great deal of land. She will have a fine fortune of her own one of these days. Some of my visitors fancied she was professional, because she is so superior to the ordinary amateur. But she only came over here to assert her independence, and to prove

her indifference to a man whom she loved, and who was quite unworthy of her."

"Indeed!" exclaims Percy, with intense interest. What will Maud say to all this by-and-by? "Please tell me more," he continues.

"Oh, I intend to make a clear breast of it now," says Lady Annette; "and as you do not offer me a chair, I shall take one."

Clare herself is so interested by this time, that she does not resent the visitor's evident intention of remaining. "The fact is, my romantic friend placed this young lover of hers on a pedestal, as silly girls will, and was mortally offended to find him stepping down and acting like an ordinary man—neither a god nor a hero; then she resolved to come to England, to see the new country, to seek for new heroes, new lovers—perhaps for a husband. And, believe me, Percy, you have found favour in her sight; so the

attraction is mutual. But she cannot reconcile the warm admiration I assured her you felt for her, with the cold fact of your protracted absence from the house of which she has for so long been the chief ornament."

"I thought, when you began to speak, you were going to tell me about——"

"The lady who suggested the picture of 'Maud Muller' to you, of course."

"Oh!" says Percy, with an odd laugh.

"Oh!" echoes Lady Annette. "I suppose you agree with me that Olly Lee is a darling?"

There is a pause: the studio-clock strikes one.

"I have actually been here an hour!" exclaims Lady Annette. "And we have friends coming to luncheon. Go back with me, Master Percy, and help Olly and me to entertain our guests. Do!"

He smiles, but he shakes his head.

"A change will do you good," says Lady Annette imperiously. "Don't refuse me. You look quite pale and worn; being shut up so much cannot suit any man. You are getting moped and dull already. I really am beginning to believe you have stuck too closely to your work this time. Always in extremes, Percy! Cannot you settle down to a pleasant middle course, as we all have to do sooner or later? The society of stupid models is certainly not beneficial to men's intellects. With a bright clever wife as a model and companion, you would be happy, and your work would prosper too. Come home with me now, dear boy, and see our little dear Olly. I promised to bring you, and she expects you. Don't disappoint us both."

"Thanks, very many," says Percy. "But you really must excuse me to-day. You forget that I am waiting for my model here, now."

"This girl with the great eyes?" says Lady Annette, pointing to the picture again. "Yes; I certainly had forgotten all about her. A most independent young person she must be to keep you waiting for hours like this. I should send her to the right-about if I found her giving herself airs. Pretty behaviour, I must say, for a—model!"

"The lady is very independent, I admit," says Percy, turning towards the screen; "but it is not her fault that I am idle to-day; and, so far from giving herself airs, she bears most patiently with all my whims and exactions, and does all she can to aid me in my work."

"Oh, my poor deluded friend!" cries Lady Annette. "Have you lived all your life among artists, only to be taken in by some commonplace model at last? Some heavy creature, too lethargic to be restless, and whom you think perfection because she

has fine eyes, and manages to stand still in a stupid unreasoning way? I only hope, for your sake, she is not some scheming adventuress. I do believe any woman might take you artists in, if only she adapts herself to the position you happen to require for your *chef-d'œuvre.* But no; I won't believe you, Percy, could really care a straw about a stupid common model. No doubt you think her good-looking, and pay her compliments, while she is laughing at them and at you. I know the tribe well, I assure you; and they are beneath intelligent discussion."

Lady Annette speaks with unusual bitterness to-day. She had set her heart on carrying her "pet" artist off to luncheon and—Olly. And she is not apt to be crossed in any plans, once she has made them; but where she finds resistance useless, she can always carry her defeat with a high hand and a smiling front.

"It is a pity you should consider yourself better engaged to-day, my dear Percy," she says, as she gives him her hand; "we would have made you very welcome; but tell me, shall I bring Olly to see your picture on Monday, or will you come to see her? Don't be ungrateful; it was she who inspired it—and you! Pray let her know the result of her wondrous eloquence."

"I will pay my respects to you and your friend on Monday next without fail, I promise you," says Percy briefly.

He wishes this trying interview were at an end.

"I see you want me to be off," says Lady Annette, laughing. "I shall begin to think that precious model of yours is in hiding somewhere now."

She moves a step towards the screen. Clare stands aghast, trembling like some guilty creature who fears detection.

But Percy remains stoically indifferent. Lady Annette is watching him, and he knows it. He is quite able to play a part when occasion demands it.

"Had my model been here before you came," he says, "not even Johnson's furious summons would have brought me to the door. I never open it when I am really at work, because, once the latch is lifted, I am no longer safe; *vide*——" a wave of his hand completes the sentence.

"I don't know which to admire most, your *sang-froid* or your impudence," says Lady Annette, moving towards the door. "But there, I won't tease you any more to-day. I shall talk to you at length on Monday, and be very careful to have no screen in my room! We are planning a yachting expedition with my dear old friend Admiral O'Leary, and we mean to take you with us. Your pictures will be hung

before we start; eavesdropping models, pert in their own conceit, dismissed *pro tem.*; and—I shall insist."

"*Nous verrons!*" says Percy, laughing.

"*Nous verrons*, indeed!" echoes her ladyship, departing; "and what is more, Olly and I mean to look after you!"

CHAPTER VIII.

CLOUDS ON THE ARTISTIC HORIZON.

Oh, how this tyrant doubt torments my breast!
My thoughts like birds, who, frightened from their nest,
Around the place where all was hushed before
Flutter and hardly nestle any more.

"My poor child!" cries Percy, meeting Clare, as she steps forth from behind the shelter of the screen; "you have suffered, I know it; but pray tell me that you are not angry with me. You surely exonerate me from blame in this matter?"

"It was all very unfortunate," says Clare,

striving to speak calmly; but she cannot succeed in steadying her voice, and her eyes are dimmed with unshed tears.

The emotion she so resolutely strives to suppress touches Percy far more than the wild remonstrances and hysterical shrieks of other women have ever done.

"I could have strangled Lady Annette as she stood here laughing and sneering," he exclaims, feeling the necessity for some vent for his pent-up feelings. "I have known her for many years, and she has always been a good friend to me; I have thought her a nice sensible woman too; but to-day she talked viciously, and—like an idiot."

"What she said was just, and to the point," says Clare, recovering her self-possession as fast as he is losing his. "You and I knew that I was behind the screen; my lady only guessed the fact as she delivered her parting thrust; and then it occurred to

her that the pert model richly deserved it. Indeed I felt all along as if I merited most of the hard hits dealt out with so liberal a hand, and that made them doubly stinging."

He pauses doubtfully. This hard mood is the last he expected to find her in; tears and protestations would have led up far more readily to the sentiments he is longing to utter. The cruel tightening of her lips, her clenched hands, and the quiet anger in her eyes disconcert him entirely.

"It is terrible to me to feel that you consider me to blame," he stammers.

"You, Mr. Hetheringham? Oh dear, no!" she says coldly. "It was unfortunate, as I said just now, neither more nor less; but you have nothing to reproach yourself with. Indeed, I am sure you would have preferred sparing me this useless humiliation had you been able."

He gives her a quick searching glance.

She looks very serious, and her tone is impressively so.

His volatile mood changes on the instant. If she chooses to be cold and proud, he can meet her half-way. He is not wont to go begging with his protestations of love and admiration; and he can hide his real feelings beneath an impenetrable mask of cynical indifference quite as well as another.

"Come, now, it really was not so dreadful after all," he says, laughing. "My lady did not see you; she only suspected your presence, and her curiosity was piqued. Under such circumstances a woman's curiosity always gets the better of her judgment."

"On the contrary," says Clare, "this lady's judgment (as you generously describe her promiscuous sneers) seems to have outweighed any small womanly feeling of interest, compassion, or curiosity. She was far too

much concerned with the artist himself to bestow much thought on his model, or—on his work."

Is it possible? Can she be jealous? is the sudden thought in his mind; and determined to try her, he says:

"I am sorry to hear you speak foolishly, just as other women do. I have gradually taught myself to have faith in your exceptional good sense; but now you seem bent on convincing me that you are as deficient in logic as the rest of your sex. You have—not without cause, I admit—taken a sudden dislike to a lady whom you have heard, though never seen; and now you are ready to lay all sorts of crimes at her door."

"Most women can get on very well as long as they have only a man to contend against," says Clare promptly; "but once bring a second woman into the camp, and some sort of rout is the immediate con-

sequence. Now, you and I have been most excellent friends ; you, kind master — I, obedient pupil ; you, painstaking artist—I, humble model ; everything most satisfactory until this enterprising lady insists on disturbing our privacy. Of course the result is trouble. My poor dear old master (not the artist I told you of) taught me to understand women ; he had not a high opinion of our sex ; but that was prejudice. Still he knew them ; and he certainly enlightened me."

She is laughing ; and she speaks with a hardihood he has never seen her exhibit before. This saucy defiance is quite a new aspect of her character, and he finds it exciting and delightful. What next will she say ? He must encourage this mood ; it is exhilarating to him, and stifles that inclination towards sentiment which might have led him —where ?

"It would take a formidable antagonist to baffle you, Miss Maud," he says, laughing also. "I'd back your self-possession and dignity against a dozen sharp-tongued Lady Annettes, or a hundred crestfallen humiliated artists."

"It may be as well that the lady and I had not the chance of a hand-to-hand encounter," says Clare. "I certainly felt exceedingly indignant, and would not have been answerable for the consequences had necessity not kept me such a close prisoner."

"And forced you to turn eavesdropper, *nolens volens*, eh?"

"*Necessitas non habet legem!*" she replies promptly. That clever old master of hers has taught her many scraps of Latin, and her own mother-wit enables her to use them when occasion warrants.

She has conquered her momentary trouble completely, as far as outward appearances go,

and she speaks as gaily as her companion can possibly desire.

"There was a time, I candidly confess," she resumes, "when I became far more interested in all the lady said about Miss Olly (?) than in nourishing my resentment of all those stinging personalities. I really am surprised that you have never mentioned that wonderful reading of 'Maud Muller' to me, Mr. Hetheringham, since it evidently suggested the first notion of the picture we have so often discussed together."

"She is—she must be jealous?" thinks Percy, with the elation of a sudden and delightful conviction. His pale face flushes as this possibility recurs to him. If she be jealous, she cares for him. He has stirred the heart within this haughty ice-maiden at last. And his reward is at hand. All these months he has been on his guard; he has enforced reserve, and restrained himself

he has been as ceremonious, cold, and distant as her unyielding dignity demanded.

But now he has moved her. And if this revelation be due to Lady Annette's visit, then he will bless that *exigeante* patroness a thousand times.

Such are the thoughts passing wildly through Percy's brain. Even to himself he has never confessed the magnitude of the passion with which Clare has inspired him. He has been too much afraid of himself, and of her, to compass the overwhelming truth.

Since on her side, however, there is a sign —just a first faint sign—of relenting, he scatters all precaution to the winds.

"Why should I ever have told you anything about Olympia Lee and her reading and her suggesting?" he cries, standing before her with flushed cheeks and shining eyes. "What did all the other women in the world matter to me—women in books or out of books—

once I had found you? You were Maud; you were my ideal, my beauty, my treasure; your presence, your voice, your smile, your supreme loveliness inspired me; you have made me work as I have never worked before; and you have made me love as I have never loved. Maud darling, adorable Maud, tell me you don't quite hate me; tell me—confess—that you like me a little?"

He has thrown himself on his knees at her feet, and is trying to possess himself of her hands. He is looking fiercely into her face the while, though his voice is broken by uncontrollable emotion.

She tries to turn her head away; she dreads meeting his eyes. All the saucy gladness has gone out of her pale frightened face; her happy smiles have changed to anxious frowns. He holds both her hands now, and is covering them with passionate kisses.

"I love you—I love you—I worship you, Maud!" He speaks in breathless whispers, and then, with a pitiful sob: "Answer me, darling; kiss me, Maud!"

She frees herself from his detaining clasp by a supreme effort.

"I implore you to let me go, now, at once," she says; and her voice is trembling in a very agony of entreaty.

She has withdrawn herself a step or two, and is again moving towards the door of the studio.

"You will let me go, Mr. Hetheringham?" she says, in the tone of one who demands a concession and expects it.

Her frightened loveless looks, her indignant withdrawal from his embrace, have chilled the fever of his passion. The flames which the supposed betrayal of her affection had so suddenly kindled are as soon extinguished by the subsequent reserve of her manner.

"I have offended you, Miss Maud?" he asks hopelessly.

"Please let me go home," she answers. "You cannot expect me to talk or to stand as your model now."

He had often called her an ice-maiden in his fantastic foreign way; he thinks of her now as such.

"You will forgive me and come again to-morrow, for the sake of—of our picture?" he pleads, as he opens the door for her.

His tone is very humble now. At this moment she knows she has nothing to fear.

And he closes the door after her and swears she is divine; but ice—she has no heart; she is not woman; she is scarcely human.

No heart?

"Harold, my darling, what shall I do? Wait—wait for you, my first and last, my only love—for ever!"

She clasps her left hand passionately with her right as she walks hurriedly along, and she presses his ring deeply into her tender flesh.

No heart?

CHAPTER IX.

DANGER.

"Reconsider questions of judgment; but it is at your peril that you reconsider questions of right and wrong."

"OLLY, my darling," says Lady Annette, on her return from her fruitless errand to the studio, "allow me to tell you that you did a very foolish thing when you persuaded me not to look after *ce cher* Percy. Some men must be hunted; others kept at bay."

"And your pet artist belongs to class

No. 1, I presume?" says Olly smiling, and much amused.

Lady Annette is decidedly out of temper. She has no smile; nor does she attempt to disguise her vexation.

"I wish you would not make light of the interest I know you feel for him in your heart, Olly," she says reproachfully.

"My heart?" laughs the girl. "Dearest lady, shall I never convince you that *cela n'a pas de raison d'être?* and that in simple truth *cela n'existe plus?*"

"In simple truth, I wish that you were not so thoroughly imbued with French idioms and French sentiments, Olympia."

"Oh don't say 'Olympia,' Lady dear, or else you will frighten me. It is but natural that I laud the French; for Paris is theirs, and Paris is but another name for Paradise, I guess. You cannot object to my admiring the light-hearted, perfectly-dressed angels of

the Bois and the boulevards. The manners of the men and the costumes of the women are equally charming."

"Admire and imitate their dresses, but do not adopt their sentiments and ideas, Olly. We English are naturally reserved, steady—perhaps a little severe; but you can certainly depend upon us; whereas French——"

"No, Lady; don't abuse the land of my ideal. It is just because Mr. Percy is more French than English that I—that I don't dislike him so much as some of the other men round. You declare I'm too independent in my views when I cry up my country and its fashions and institutions; and now you are mad with me for praising the people I've so much sympathy for, because they are gay and light-hearted, and know how to make the best of their time. I begin to think you are not very satisfied with your visit to the studio this morning; but then

you should rather visit your anger on that fine Mr. Percy, who requires to be hunted, and has——" Olly pauses for a moment and makes a comical grimace, before she adds: "*Has* he eluded your pursuit? I expected to see him return at the wheels of your triumphal car. Tell me what has happened. You know I am most disappointed indeed to find he is staying away. I fully expected you would bring him round to luncheon, and thought we were going to have a real good time again."

"Oh Olly, if you had only condescended to come with me now and then, and to look after this rebellious youth!—but you have been very perverse in this matter."

Lady Annette tries to frown; but Olly's tragic expression and theatrical gestures of despair force her to smile.

"I believe, I fear he has fallen into bad hands now," says her ladyship sadly. "Men

can never be trusted to go straight by themselves. They are weak impressionable creatures, all of them—blown hither and thither by the flattering wind of Fancy. And my belief is that a designing model has resolved to turn Percy's head, and has—succeeded."

"*Ce pauvre homme!* I beg pardon, Lady dear—the poor man. Tell me, does he walk backwards now?"

Lady Annette disdains to reply to such frivolity. Her mind is still full of that pet scheme of hers. She feels that she has been checkmated by an unexpected adversary to-day, and is consequently disappointed and in no mood for jesting.

"Some handsome girl, with great brown eyes, has been posing for him as 'Maud Muller,'" she says; "and for the moment he seems wrapped up in her and her vulgar attractions."

"'Maud Muller?'" repeats Miss Lee; and

a faint tinge of colour mounts slowly into her pale face. It is the first outward indication of any hidden feeling. "'Maud Muller' was my suggestion," she says, as though protesting. "He told me that, and he thanked me—oh, with effusion! It would have been better had he said less, and proved his gratitude by soliciting my further interest in the progress of his work."

"Now that it is too late you have come to my way of thinking," says Lady Annette reproachfully.

"And did he refuse to come here to-day?" asks Olly, wondering.

"Yes; he refused point-blank."

"Then I hope you will ask him no more for my sake, Lady. I can never agree with you about the pursuing of men; if they do not choose to come of their own free will, it is assuredly best they should stay away altogether."

"You cannot treat men like a flock of sheep, Olly. What agrees with one is poison to another."

"I like sheep: they can all be driven away in a flock. Men that require delicate individual manœuvring will never suit me. I guess I'm too proud for that; and besides, I have had one experience, and that was sufficiently *triste*, you will own."

"I am trying to save you from a second, my child," says Lady Annette fondly.

"You are indeed most good to me," says the girl fervently; "and I am sure it would be wisest and best for me to trust myself and my future in your hands, without fear and without reserve."

"You will not be surprised to hear that I consider that as quite the most sensible remark you have made to-day, missy," says Lady Annette, laughing; "and I am more than half inclined to take you at your word."

"*Allons*; I think you will find me capable of improvement; and I know I shall be grateful."

"I shall soon put you to the test, Miss Olly, for I have told Percy he is to be of our yachting party," resumes her ladyship, smiling, and relieved to find that her *protégée* is more deeply moved by the artist's indifference than she seemed at first inclined to admit.

"And did his majesty consent to that arrangement, or was his point-blank refusal repeated?"

"Nothing was definitively settled; but you may take for granted that he will accompany us."

"Then I will wait for my opportunity," thinks Olympia, setting her lips and her eyebrows in fine parallel lines, which mean, determination. "When he and I are on the high seas together, the duel shall be fought out, and I will prove which Maud

Muller has triumphed; the ideal which I inspired, or the coarse reality of that large-eyed model, who thinks she is having all things to her own liking at present."

* * * * *

Far from exulting in "having all things to her own liking," the large-eyed model, of whom refined Miss Olly thinks as a coarse reality, is, indeed, in a most melancholy and dejected state. All things seem to combine to bring fresh trouble and anxiety upon her innocent head again. No sooner has she extricated herself from one maze of trouble, than she finds herself threatened by new and unforeseen danger; and the path that led to it has been so easy, so pleasant and seductive, so free from any repulsive suggestion or association, that she has wandered along it contented, confiding, without suspicion or fear.

Poor Clare, indeed, is very unhappy, perplexed, and ill at ease.

She had commenced her duties as Percy's model with admirable resolution, and she has fulfilled her good intentions so conscientiously, that it seems doubly hard to her to find her peace of mind, and the routine to which she has adapted herself, ruthlessly disturbed by this most unexpected ebullition of sentiment on Percy's part.

The great picture is almost completed now. It was only yesterday Mr. Hetheringham had said:

"Ten more sittings, and your part of the arduous labour of months will be completed, Miss Maud. I can manage the finishing-touches without a model. So next week you will be able to devote yourself to painting on your own account; and if you will work here I can assist you by a hint now and then."

The days and weeks have gone by smoothly, pleasantly. Since the old happy

Torchester time, Clare has never known such peace and tranquillity as she has enjoyed at the studio of late.

Must all that be changed now? Have those happy, busy, good days come to a sudden end?

Must she go forth into the cold cruel world again, friendless, seeking employment, sympathy, charity? and finding no one ready to stretch forth a helping hand, no one to lead her out of the slough of despond? She is in any case better off now than she was four months ago.

She has been paid every Saturday morning for the week's sittings; and as the rent of her lodging is moderate, and her manner of life the most economical, she has already saved up a nice little sum, to which the sale of her exquisite needlework has added considerably.

What shall she do now?

Would it be dangerous, wrong, to go back to the studio again just for those ten days necessary to the completing of the picture?

Percy seemed so humble, so full of contrition, when she left him this morning. And he was as uncertain of her return as she felt herself.

Must she write him a formal letter, and tell him she cannot return to the studio after what has occurred? Suddenly a new thought possesses her, and fresh doubts arise in her mind. Does Percy really care for her? Does he love her?

What was his intention when he fell on his knees, and swore he loved her as he had never loved before? That is what men—the heroes of novels—say when they make declarations. Perhaps it is the same in real life also. .

But surely something is always said

about marriage as well as love on those confidential occasions? Clare's personal experience is limited; but she has one tender recollection. In that a bright-haired lad, who is standing beside her, plays the principal part.

They are in the old college-garden at Torchester, and he, throwing his arm around her, and drawing her towards him in a close embrace, whispers:

"I love you, Clare, with all my heart. Do you love me, and will you promise to be my wife some day?"

Mr. Hetheringham never mentioned the word "wife." Though Clare was much startled and confused, she perfectly remembers all that passed between them, and she is painfully sure that no allusion whatever was made to the future.

What, then, was the object of this vague declaration of love?

Lord Verstrume—— Oh, but she will not insult either Harold or Percy by comparing the old reprobate's noxious compliments and injurious offers even in thought to the sweet things the young men have whispered to her.

Yes; even Percy's words were sweet to listen to, though they awoke no response in her heart.

The fact of being admired, loved, is always delightful to a woman, and the brilliant spark of declared passion must kindle some pleasing emotion within her, however transitory its nature.

Clare likes Percy; she admires his obvious talents, his spirited conversation, and fascinating manner; but—she does not trust him.

In her present reflective mood she realises that she has never been quite at her ease in the studio, and that the constraint she has put upon herself has been the result

of a dim unacknowledged fear of him and of what he might say or do next.

And to-day he has broken down the barrier she had so conscientiously erected between them, with a ruthless hand; and in an access of passion, that has filled her with fear—with fear only—he has declared his love for her.

His love—*cui bono?*

Does she feel love for him?

That is the vital question; but there is no hesitation about the answer.

Clare is quite able to draw certain conclusions from ascertained facts. She knows well that, if her momentary excitement were the result of deep feeling, she could not stay to analyse its nature, nor to balance the weight of the words he has spoken.

When Harold said "I love you," it was enough, and she lived on contented in the joy of that knowledge, and looked hopefully

towards the future. Now Percy has said "I love you!" with passionate vehemence; but his declaration, instead of satisfying, has only moved her to doubt and distrust. Suddenly her thoughts fly off into a new vein of speculation. Suppose Percy were inclined to marry her — would she consent?

She is alone in her little room as she asks herself this pregnant question; but it floods her sweet face with blushes. She is always so very lonely now. She has tried to teach herself that Harold, in any case, is lost to her for ever, that she must resign herself to the inevitable, and strive to forget the past, which is dead.

As Percy's wife?

Oh, her faith in herself is shaken; she has been brooding too long over all these doubtful harassing matters. It is not good to be so much alone. And, to avoid any

further mental examination of the state of her heart and mind, she takes her work down to the lower room, where Mrs. Andrew is sitting. They are mostly together now when Clare has spare hours during the afternoon and evening.

Mrs. Andrew, observant but discreet as ever, notes the unwonted cloud upon her lodger's face, and ponders uneasily concerning its origin.

The methodical old lady has learnt to trust and respect her pretty lodger thoroughly by this time, and is really very much attached to the bright, sweet-tempered, industrious girl. Over their work they have often chatted together, tacitly avoiding any talk about the present, but dipping into the past, amusing themselves by speculations on the future and concerning the other lodgers, whom Clare occasionally meets on the stairs or in the passages.

Sometimes Clare reads the paper to her landlady, and then there is always plenty to talk about.

But this afternoon Clare lays the newspaper aside; she has something on her mind which is of far more importance to her than the general news of the day. It has occurred to her that she may discover something in the past experiences of her quiet old landlady which may serve as a guide to her in her present dilemma.

"Mrs. Andrew," she says, looking up from her work, "were you very much in love with your husband?"

"My dear young lady! Lor', it's close on thirty years ago now since Jim and I kept company together, poor lad! And after we was married he went off to sea; he was a sailor, miss, you know."

Clare does not know, and she is startled. It must have been inspiration that prompted

her to evoke this slumbering memory of the poor lad who went off to sea.

"I know nothing about him, Mrs. Andrew. Do tell me all you can remember, if you don't mind," she says earnestly. "I do like to hear real love-stories; it's far better than reading them, to know they're all true; and I am especially interested if the hero is a sailor. I always liked sailors so much."

"More's the pity, my dear, for there's little but trouble and fretting to be got out of your liking for them. They have a bad time of it on the high seas, and the girls that cares for them never knows no peace on shore. My Jim he was a sailor on one of Mr. Bacchelier's fine ships. I was only parlourmaid when Jim first came a-courting of me. Mr. Bacchelier he was very kind to both of us. 'Only one more voyage before you marry Mary,' he says to my Jim, 'and one after. Then you'll settle down, and I'll

look after the two of you. You will both serve me well, and I mean to provide a home for you.' Then my Jim went away to China, and he were gone more than a year; and there was a hatter at Brixton what had a fine large business, and he told me it would be no use waiting for a sailor. 'They have a wife in every port,' he says; 'and Jim Andrew 'll have forgotten all about you by this time.' That was for his own ends Mr. Smith spoke that way against sailors, for he wanted to have me himself." A gleam of satisfaction lurks in the old lady's dim eyes as she makes this admission. "Fact is, my dear," she resumes impressively, "a good-looking girl, who can keep herself tidy, and knows the use of her hands, need never want for lovers. I had a bit of money, too, left me by my father, and sixty pounds a year for certain isn't to be despised when a man looks for a satisfactory partner. And I dare-

say Mr. Smith had thought of all that. I never mention your name, miss, without being reminded of him. I think my head was a little turned by all his attentions, and his fine promises too. He had such a large house, and he kept a servant; and sometimes I thought what was the use of fretting for Jim—gone such a long time, and most like having forgotten me; and then I turned it over in my mind that, if Mr. Smith was to marry me, I'd be a deal better off than I was as a spinster and parlourmaid to Mr. Bacchelier.

"They say pride's bound to have a fall. Mine did—all of a sudden, too; for one day Mr. Smith he says, 'Polly, we're very good friends, and it's very pleasant meeting you in the lanes, and having those talks with you; but I'm tired of all this fooling: I want something settled between us." And then he asked me to come and look after his house

and his servant, and his little child too. He was a widower, you see, and he told me I should be missus in the place, and have my own way in all things; but never a word about a wedding, or a wife, or a ring. And that was the end of our friendship. He wrote me letters, and he waited about in the lanes for the sake of another talk with me; but words don't go for much, to my mind, when there's deeds as belie them. I soon forgot Mr. Smith and his rubbish, though; for next Christmas my Jim came back safe and sound, and on Easter Monday we was married, and Mr. Bacchelier himself gave me away.

"That was a happy day for all of us, I think; but life is short, and so are good times. My poor Jim went off for his last trip, and he never came back no more. He died of the dreadful fever they have in them foreign parts, and is buried in a place they call Monte Video, poor lad."

She takes off her clumsy horn spectacles, and wipes away a furtive tear.

"Believe me, my dear, it's a bad time the sailors—lor', how that postman do make me jump!"

The sudden rat-tat at the street-door has startled them both.

"I'll run and answer him," says Clare, and hastens upstairs expectant.

She is rewarded for her alacrity by receiving a letter from the hands of a commissionaire, who says he was told to wait for an answer. The letter is from Mr. Hetheringham, who writes:

"DEAR MISS MAUD,

"My future conduct shall atone for my indiscretion this morning. Will you trust me again, and will you believe that I most bitterly regret having caused you

one moment's uneasiness? I think and hope you will, and I implore you to grant me a few more sittings. You shall have no further complaints to make against me, I promise you. For the sake of *our* picture, pray grant my request.

"The fate of 'Maud Muller' rests with you. If you refuse to return as usual to-morrow, I shall set the picture aside, shut up the studio, and leave England immediately.

"That is my determination. It rests with you to hasten, or delay, my departure. I await your reply.

"P. H."

What reply shall the messenger take back to "P. H.?"

When Clare left the studio, burning with indignation, her heart revolting against Percy, and turning with a fresh impetus of love and

longing to Harold, she had decided that nothing should induce her to stand for "Maud Muller" again.

But that was surely a rash, perhaps an unwarrantable, decision on her part.

What possible fear can there be in returning to her pleasant duties, since he is convinced of his indiscretion, and so evidently repents?

Why should she hesitate to trust him once more?

What, after all, has he done?

He told her he loved her. Is the fact of his devotion in itself a crime?

In this momentary rebound of her feeling, that declaration of love seems rather to his credit. He spoke because he could keep silence no longer. The knowledge of his admiration in itself is really delightful. It is always good to know that one is adored.

She has surely been hard, hasty, un-

generous; and apart from all personal consideration, she is quite aware that he wants her for the picture. It seems as if they have worked at it together hitherto; shall she consent to his abandoning it now, when it is so nearly completed?

"I will come as usual to-morrow," is the answer she sends, hastily scrawled in pencil upon his envelope.

And on the morrow she goes.

CHAPTER X.

A DESPERATE RESOLVE.

Peril is the element in which power is developed.

CLARE resumes her duties as model, as though nothing had happened to disturb the placid routine of those diurnal meetings in the studio. Her manner is as quiet as, though if possible more reserved than, before. Percy, in a secret fever of excitement, watches her with seeming indifference, while he is really wrought up to a high pitch of passion.

The fact of her returning at all after his wild demonstration on the previous day gives him far more encouragement than all the weeks of their placid and friendly intercourse have done.

She cares for him, and is thankful to know how much he admires her, or else she would not have returned and risked a repetition of his declarations. It is only a question of patience and discretion now. In the end he is bound to triumph, for her heart has spoken for him. Had there been no latent response to his passionate appeal, fear would have kept her away. She is as timid as she is proud. But love conquers pride and casteth out fear.

His next advance must be made with the utmost caution; but the time will surely come, and ere long, when she will avow that she returns his affection. Ah, would this were the hour he might know

his fate! Would he might throw up all his engagements in town, the dinner and the supper parties, the dances and the *fêtes!*

Should he go abroad with Lady Annette and that dainty clever little American girl or no? He has no such intention; but he certainly would love to take Maud away with him to-morrow, to-day. They would go to Italy together, straight away; and oh, how he would rejoice in watching her sweet face light up at the wonders he could show her!

"Are you ready for me, Mr. Hethering-ham?" she says, suddenly bringing him back from wild dreams of the future to the realistic present and her expectant pose.

"Do you intend to change the position of the head after all?" she asks, in the most matter-of-fact tone, alluding to an alteration he had proposed to her on the previous day.

With an effort he regains his self-command, and forgets his dreams as he confronts his canvas and his model.

There is certainly no wandering of her attention.

Never has she posed more steadily, never seemed more determined to fulfil her self-imposed task to his perfect satisfaction.

When she goes away to her dinner they both have the satisfaction of knowing that a thoroughly good morning's work has been accomplished. And, much elated by the encouraging aspect things have taken from his point of view, Percy at dusk goes off to see Lady Annette.

He has a feeling of compunction now for the scant courtesy he showed her when last she paid him a visit, and he is determined to efface the disagreeable impression he must have made then, by the perfect amiability of his conduct to-day.

He is in excellent spirits, diverts his hostess and Miss Lee by all sorts of lively anecdotes, reminiscences, and such current bits of scandal as are *à la mode* in all social circles. He gladly accepts Lady Annette's cordial invitation to stay and dine, and having hurried back to his studio to change his coat, he returns in time to accompany the ladies to a monster concert at the Albert Hall.

And, sweeter and clearer than the thrilling notes of the world-famed *prima donna* on the platform, a hopeful voice in Percy's heart sings: "Maud loves me, and soon will be mine!"

"You were perfectly charming to-night, my dear Olly," says Lady Annette to her friend, after Percy has left them. "What chance has an 'ox-eyed Juno' against your sweet culture, your quaint winsome ways? Believe me, our artist is worth winning,

my child, and rejoice with me that he is now really beginning to prove his allegiance to you."

"If he cares for me, why would he not be persuaded to go abroad with us in May, as we both so much wish him to do?" asks Olly doubtfully.

"Why will men never consent to do anything just when and as women wish it done, little lady?"

"Because they prefer to be obstinate and provoking, most likely," says Olly crossly.

"Don't lose your temper, child; you are too decided a brunette to frown with impunity."

"I guess that model Maud of Mr. Percy's makes him do anything pretty much as she likes, all the same. Is she a blonde, and is she downright handsome?"

"I have not seen her, Olly; but from her portrait I imagine she must be what men call a fine woman, nothing more."

"Quite enough for the artist that's painting her, I'm very sure of that," says Olly ruefully, and after a pause. "He was thinking of her all this evening," she adds, "although he was sitting by my side and talking to you, Lady."

Olympia is evidently taking the matter *au grand sérieux.* Not the ghost of a smile is visible on her grave delicate face.

"What makes you think such nonsense as that, my child?" asks Lady Annette, surprised.

"I don't think, I feel," says the girl with conviction; and, with a sudden burst of emotion, she flings her arms around her kind friend's neck, and hiding her small pale face, she whispers: "I care too much about him to mistake his thoughts, and I fear I love him far better already than is well for my peace of mind."

Perhaps the girl's instincts are right.

Lady Annette is alarmed, and the chief cause of her anxiety is that model who had looked at her from the canvas with such sad pleading eyes.

Who is the girl, and what hold has she on that tiresome volatile Percy? He has certainly shown himself quite incapable of any lasting emotion hitherto. What fancy possesses him now?

"A little patience, my darling Olly," says her ladyship gently; "if Fate so far favours us as to induce him to go abroad with us, all will be well."

Fate, in this instance, used "Maud Muller" as her instrument; and this is what happened to induce Percy to accept a berth on board Admiral O'Leary's schooner-yacht *Sea Lark*.

Clare's attendance at the studio has been regular. The ten days necessary for the completion of the picture are over. Percy, though still convinced of his ultimate success

with "Maud," has practised more restraint over his emotional tendencies than he would have deemed himself capable of, after his model had so elated him by her return to her duties, and his forgetfulness of his own.

She, firmly convinced of his good faith, and never doubting his sincere contrition for that purposeless declaration of love which had so frightened her, has resumed all her former tranquillity, and moves about the studio, posing, drawing, or working by turns, with all the sweet feminine grace that makes it so delightful to him to watch her.

As she was bent on saving up her money very carefully, she has not invested in any new clothes since the memorable day on which she made such elaborate purchases at the shop in the Edgware Road.

"Maud," says Percy, who has been taking stock of her costume as she sits at a little

distance from him, "it is quite time you had a new dress. This bright spring sunshine is showing up all the worn places in that dismal-looking garment of yours. I love to see pretty women wearing pretty clothes, and now that our picture is finished you will have time to make yourself something new. I have put an address in this envelope, and before you come to me to-morrow for your last sitting I want you to go to the place indicated, and purchase the things of which a list is enclosed. No, don't open the envelope now; I have a reason for asking you not to do so until to-morrow; and in any case I want no thanks—please remember that."

She looks at him in some surprise, but she certainly has no suspicion that the envelope she carefully puts into her pocket contains a banknote for twenty pounds.

He watches her with intense satisfaction.

He has made his plans, and her gentle acquiescence encourages him to carry them out. But he is not sufficiently master over himself to remain passively in front of his easel now the decisive moment is at hand.

He begins to pace to and fro, measuring the length of the studio with his impatient strides.

Clare glances at him, and wonders what makes him so restless; but she continues her steady stitch-stitch, without the slightest uneasiness on her own account. He is fond of walking about while he is considering. Most likely the idea of some fresh picture is preoccupying him now "Maud" is finished.

"Maud," he says, suddenly pausing in front of the canvas they have both so often and eagerly scanned together, "come and look at this drapery."

She advances obediently; such summons from him is of frequent occurrence; but as

she approaches, his critical aspect changes, and instead of waiting until she takes her place by his side, he suddenly steps towards her, and, flinging his arms around her, covers her face with passionate kisses.

"Don't try to resist me, my darling, my darling!" he cries. "You knew that I loved you, and you came back to me, thank God! and now all restraint is at an end between us, and you will be mine; and you shall be worshipped as never an idol was worshipped yet. Goddess of beauty, queen among women, my peerless ice-maiden, my lovely beloved love! say, will you go away with me to-day—to-morrow? I am free now; the pictures can go into the Academy, and we will read of them in the far sunny south. Oh Maud, my darling, my angel! tell me you love me. I know it—I feel it; but I long for one kiss from you, that tells me it is all—all true."

She is very pale; but very quiet. She does not attempt to struggle with him this time, as she has done before.

The words he has said have convinced her of her folly, her recklessness, in trusting to a man's discretion once she knew she had roused his passion. Why had it not been with her as with Mrs. Andrew? Why was not that one degrading scene, with "never a word about a wedding, or a wife, or a ring," enough for her?

Why had not that made an end to her friendship with Percy, as it ought to have done?

She feels that she herself is most, if not entirely, to blame for the miserable plight in which she now finds herself. And with a noble effort of courage she determines to accept the inevitable consequence of her own folly.

Percy, encouraged by her resignation,

continues to lavish caresses and words of endearment upon her.

Her heart beats loud and fast. She is trembling all over, and betraying her weakness in spite of her determination to appear calm, cold, and collected.

"Save me, good Lord!" is the unspoken prayer on her lips.

By a coincidence which, when it happens so opportunely, appears a direct interposition of Providence, a loud double-knock at the door of the studio startles Percy into sudden wrath at this moment.

Clare feels that her prayer is practically answered, and thanks God for what appears a miracle.

How the knock affects Percy may be inferred from the savage anathema which he is too furious to repress.

"Hide yourself, child!" he calls back into

the studio as he crosses the antechamber on his way to the outer door.

She feels as sure as he does that Lady Annette waits without. And they both know by experience that resistance is useless if her ladyship has made up her mind to come in.

But this time it is not only her ladyship who is resolute.

Clare, in wild haste, seizes her hat and jacket, and, as the visitors enter the narrow tesselated passage which leads to the studio, the model emerges from it.

The three women—Lady Annette, Olympia Lee, and "Maud Muller"—confront one another for a breathless moment, a protracted period of time which extends to a long minute, and seems like an hour.

In that minute they have taken stock of one another, as women do when the question at issue between them is—a man.

"She is beautiful!" admits Olympia, with the honest generosity of unspoiled girlhood.

"So we have routed our enemy, and enter with flying colours," thinks Lady Annette, giving the enemy a cruelly supercilious glance *en passant*. And sweeping on into the studio: "Come, Olly," she says, "I am glad to find we shall not be subjected to eavesdropping to-day." Then, noticing a futile attempt on Percy's part to prevent the model's egress, she adds: "Listeners never hear any good of themselves."

The clear *staccato* tone, and the *roulade* of laughter which follows the apostrophe, resound in Clare's tingling ears as she flies down the narrow passage at the side of Mrs. Spruce's establishment.

Olympia comments on the picture. Lady Annette declares that the model herself has a nasty bold look which she is thankful to see has not been portrayed on the canvas.

"We are but the *avant-courrières* of *Madame la Mère*," continues her ladyship, smiling graciously. "Mrs. Hetheringham and your uncle are both coming in half an hour, Percy. They will bring a picnic-basket with luncheon; and Olly and I are going to lay the table for a *partie carrée* in the studio; but stay, there will be five of us. Have you enough plates and knives and forks?"

Percy feels he is caught in a trap. Egress is impossible for him. He must resign himself, and let his guests have their own way. It is not the first time he has entertained luncheon and tea parties in the studio.

As soon as they have all gone, he will run round to Mrs. Andrew, explain matters to Maud, pacify and bring her back with him again.

But by the time the luncheon, the coffee and cigarettes, the liqueurs, and the after-

noon tea are partaken of in due succession, the short spring day has come to an end. It is six o'clock and quite dark when at last he is alone, and able to follow the wild promptings of his overwhelming desire to see Clare again, and to settle the joint plans for their happy future in uninterrupted consultation. He does not lose a moment now, and is soon standing at Mrs. Andrew's door, eager, impatient.

CHAPTER XI.

INTERESTED; NOT DISINTERESTED.

Et vous n'aimez que vous, quand vous croyez l'aimer.

"SHE seemed in a heap of trouble. She's gone for good: she's paid her bills, and she's left this letter!"

Mr. Hetheringham repeats Mrs. Andrew's disjointed explanation in an amazed tone, and then sums up his impression of the bewildering statements by saying, in an odd broken voice:

"I don't understand, Mrs. Andrew; what does it all mean?"

And yet Mrs. Andrew's detailed account of her lodger's return from the studio and subsequent disappearance are intelligible enough.

Percy mechanically accepts the chair the old lady offers him in that neat little parlour of hers to which he had brought Clare last November, nearly four months ago.

Gone!

Left a note of thanks and the money due to Mrs. Andrew in her bedroom, besides a week's rent in lieu of a week's notice.

Mrs. Andrew tells her story a second time, and Percy begins to understand it all now.

"She always was the most regular and honest and upright in all her ways," says the landlady regretfully; "far be it from me to complain; but to think of her letting

herself out of the house on the sly, while I was making such a good cup of tea for her too! It's that that was hard. Going off without so much as a shake of the hand and we always was such good friends—meaning no disrespeck to the lady, sir, for a lady she certainly was; and always so sweet-tempered and cheerful like, until about a fortnight ago. Then she came in to dinner one day, looking so ill, very ill, and she seemed flurried like, and wouldn't touch a bit nor sup. She told me she had come straight home from your studio, sir; but something had certainly happened to put her out."

Mrs. Andrew pauses; her tone suggests an inquiry which her discretion forbids her to put into words.

"Did she say anything—did she explain what had happened to put her out?" asks Percy, again quoting Mrs. Andrew's phrase.

He feels a little bewildered still, and at a loss for words to convey his meaning.

"No, sir; she was always a quiet sensible lady, she knew how to hold her own and was never given to chattering; but from that day to this she's been so dull and so over-anxious-looking, it made me fancy something was a-going to happen; but we never can tell which way the wind will blow up the dust, or whence trouble will come next, and I certainly never thought of this—never."

The poor woman finds the rare tears of age blurring her spectacles; so she takes them off, and while she is rubbing them with her handkerchief she is looking at "Master Percy," who sits there motionless, and has never even opened the letter "Miss Smith" has left for him.

"Would you like more light, sir?" asks Mrs. Andrew; but he starts up.

"I must be off now," he says hurriedly; "I will let you know early to-morrow, if I hear anything more of your runaway lodger."

Mrs. Andrew does not like what he says or the tone in which he says it. She had hoped he would read the letter there, and give her some information.

I begin to think he had something to do with her trouble, poor thing; it's a pity she didn't speak out that day her heart was so full, and she asked me them odd questions about my Jim, and I told her about Mr. Smith and his — ah! she thought a good deal about that, I know, and I shouldn't wonder if she just drawed me out a-purpose like; and it was something that happened with Master Percy as put them questions into that pretty wise head of hers.

Percy walks hurriedly away to his studio.

Ah, if she should be standing upon his doorstep, awaiting his return!

It does not seem possible that she should have fled—have hidden herself from him—gone out of his life as suddenly as she came into it. To compose himself he lights a pipe, and, settled in his armchair, commences the perusal of her letter:

"DEAR MR. HETHERINGHAM,

"Our meeting and parting to-day were final. I can never come to your studio again. My want of decision has already given you a bad impression of me; perhaps you will think better of me now you find I have really gone.

"I trust you will believe that I am deeply grateful for the many kindnesses you have done me. And I implore you not to judge my sudden and necessary departure harshly.

"I am sure you will not think me dishonest because I shall venture to keep a part of the money you gave me this morning, and which you intended for an outfit.

"I reserve ten pounds as a loan, because I have once known the horror of absolute poverty, and intend to protect myself against so frightful a calamity in future, if possible.

"I hope to return you the sum I have ventured to borrow within six months, or a year at most. The other ten pounds you will find enclosed.

"I have tried to be of some use to you as your model. You have paid me generously, and, what is worth far more, you have treated me with kindness and consideration, and made the hours I have spent in your studio some of the pleasantest of my life.

"Farewell; may you prosper as you

deserve to do! I shall always remember you gratefully; though we are never likely to meet again, I hope you will not think unkindly of

"MAUD MULLER."

"The same passions are very different in different men. The same woman may please several men, yet each man may like her for a different quality. It is also quite possible that the lady in question does not possess any of the qualities for which her various lovers and admirers have given her credit. They admire a certain quality: earnestness, truth, purity; they endow a certain woman with that quality, and they fancy they like her because she possesses it."

Thus writes one, whose knowledge of life, of light loves and interested passion, is indisputable. And his words apply to a

certain class of love and lover of which Percy Hetheringham is a fair type.

When he has read "Maud's" letter, the feeling that possesses him is one of rage rather than sorrow.

He does not grieve at the idea of her having gone forth alone again to face the cruel world; but he is full of commiseration for himself. He has been duped, injured, ill-treated.

"I rescued her from the streets," he thinks bitterly; "from want, misery, perhaps from shame; and this is her gratitude!" Then he curses his ill-luck and her heartlessness. "It is always the way if you treat a woman exceptionally well," he mutters furiously. "I adored her, and—she has thrown me. If I had hectored it over her, abused and ill-used her, perhaps she would have cared for me. 'Kittle kattle' the best of them. And I—I loved this girl.

I'd have devoted my life to her, and been good to her always, gentle, kind, tender, and true. And she flings me off like an old glove. Confound her!"

He jumps up, knocks the ashes out of his pipe viciously. Hot tears, tears of disappointment and mortification, fill his eyes, and he grinds his teeth fiercely.

Presently he flings himself face downwards upon the sofa—the sofa on which he had laid her so tenderly, so anxiously, on that first night, the night he had found her, frozen, poor girl! poor girl! He sobs aloud, and does not even stop to analyse the emotion which prompts him to weep.

He is half a Frenchman, and therefore more impulsive, excitable, and demonstrative than the thoroughbred Briton ever is. He takes an enormous interest and delight in his personal emotions—speculates upon, analyses, and wonders at them. But he differs from

the gay Gaul in one essential particular—he is silent where women are concerned, and quite unlike that proverbial Parisian who "tells" even where "he has not kissed."

Well, Maud need be under no apprehension. He will never be led into speaking of her, whether an ill word or a good. He will be asked heaps of questions, of course, as soon as that picture goes in. Fellows will chaff him about the mysterious model they none of them know, and his friends the ladies will have plenty to say on the subject of this handsome *incognita* too.

Lady Annette and that odd American girl, with her quaint ways and incisive speeches, will ask him a thousand questions, of course.

And the whole subject is utterly distasteful to him already.

Where has she gone? what has she done with herself? Will pursuit on his part lead him to any trace of her?

Confound her, no! She has hidden herself from others before now, according to her own confession. Why was he idiot enough to take compassion on her in the first instance? He is so angry with her at this moment that he feels as if he hated her, and, *à propos* of that startling sentiment, a thought he has lately read in a French novel comes into his head: "*Plus on aime sa maîtresse, plus on est prête à la haïr.*" She would not consent to be *sa maîtresse*, foolish girl. She may go farther and fare worse.

He had loved her passionately, and she had treated him shamefully. *Hélas!* that is the way of the world. It is decidedly a very great mistake to care much about anybody or anything. Women always make fools of men once they find men really devoted to them.

And yet—Maud is a woman who might love a man, and well too? Did she love

that idiot for whose sake she persisted in wearing that enigmatical ring?

A stupid contradiction that motto on the face of it, "For ever!"

Nothing can last for ever. Neither love, nor anger, nor even an excellent cigar.

Percy flings the ashes of his away. He had consoled himself with one after his pipe had failed to soothe him; and he had turned the gas on in a great blaze, and sat studying her beautiful face, as it looked pensively out from the canvas. And then he had reflected on the mutability of people and things, and so had got over his ill-humour too. He was not a man likely to love or to suffer long under any circumstances.

Change was a necessity of his existence.

Opposition would stimulate him for a time, but for a time only.

The only mistress to whom, on the whole, he has been tolerably faithful, is Art. And to

her he has not proved a cold or desultory wooer. To give her her due, he is ready to admit that she, in her turn, had never disappointed him.

As for Maud—"*Amare e non essere amato è tempo perduto!*" he exclaims; and finding he has allowed his cigar to go out during his varied meditations he flings that away. "Never relight a cigar or a love," he mutters, with a cynical smile. "Farewell to you, Maud. You were right to go as you did and when you did.

"Best for thee and best for me."

He sings the refrain in his clear tenor voice. "Decidedly best for us both. Heaven only knows how far my infatuation and her pride might have led us. I could not marry her, of course; and I have an idea that nothing but marriage would ever have suited my lady. If I had seen much more of her I am by no

means sure that I might not even have committed social suicide for her sake. She is certainly charming enough and lovely enough to turn a man's head altogether. But my age of romance must be over by this time; and I ought to be thankful that she has had the good sense to abstain from leading me into temptation."

With a sudden revulsion of feeling a new idea takes possession of him. Shall he try to find her?

Money will do anything, everything. Money and detectives will bring him face to face with her again.

Shall he try it? Shall he ask her to be his wife? She is a lady; a man might be very proud of so handsome a wife as that. And—she is good.

Good? Better than gold. But no,

Best for thee and best for me.

The refrain haunts him, and he sings it with passionate emphasis.

He has truly left the age of romance and of disinterestedness far behind him.

Elasticity cannot be restored to feelings that have been overstrained. Percy has exhausted true sentiment long ago. Thanks to his volatile temperament, he may still enjoy fleeting fancies; but the heights and the depths of passion are unattainable for him.

He had liked Clare very much indeed, better than any woman he had met for years past.

And yet, a month after she had left him, he was full of fresh hopes and bright anticipations, in which another woman played a conspicuous part.

The voyage in the *Sea Lark* is definitely settled now, and the pleasantest part of the prospect, to Percy's mind, is the promised companionship of that quaint little American

lady, who, as Lady Annette so persistently reminds him, was certainly the first to inspire him with the subject of his principal picture for this year's Academy.

Now he thinks of all this, he remembers he really has cause to be very grateful to Miss Olympia Lee, and he certainly has made up his mind to show her every attention in his power.

"I wonder if you will let me call you Maud, Miss Lee?" he whispers tenderly, as he sits by her side on the deck of the yacht the evening of their embarkation. "It is such a pretty name, and I am sure I can never think of you by any other." . . .

The silver moon smiles above them, and Olly smiles too; but with a little shiver, for the night, though clear and springlike, is chilly.

Percy wraps her fur-lined cloak closely about her.

"Will you let me, Maud?" he says.

"I guess you are let do most things you like, Mr. Percy," she answers, with a little laugh.

And so the voyage commences prosperously indeed.

END OF VOL. II.

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